ALL ABOUT HISTORY

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How the mafia fought Nazi agents in New York

FROST FAIRS

London's lost carnival on the ice

Dragon Empress

Why Wu Zetian is the only woman to ever rule China

THE RULES OF REVENGE

VIKING JUSTICE

Trial by combat, banishment, and the blood eagle – the brutal truth behind the Norse honour code

BLOODY BYZANTINES

How the Romans lived on in the East

THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

TRACING THE SEASON'S ORIGINS

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Find out how New York gangsters like Lucky Luciano helped fight Nazis on America's home front from page 64

Welcome

Nothing says 'season's greetings' quite like an angry Viking coming at you with an axe, does it? Sadly, he's not offering it as a gift – rather he's challenging you to trial by combat. This was just one of several ways Norse law allowed the warriors to settle disputes. You might also face banishment, walking on burning hot coals, or even certain death. However, the Vikings were not savages: most of their squabbles were settled through arbitration, while a jury of your peers would determine your sentence. The laws themselves did not come from on high either, but were voted on by the entire community. Face Viking justice from page 28.

While our front cover may seem lacking in festive spirit, you will discover that the Vikings may have been partly responsible for the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe in our Secret History of Christmas special feature. Discover 49 more cracking festive facts like this from page 36 onwards.

If you appreciated that our magazine cover was at least snowy, you will love London's lost frost fairs. For 300 years, the River Thames used to freeze solid and hosted a carnival on the ice. But there hasn't been one since 1814. Find out why and what a frost fair involved from page 52.

Jack Parsons
Editor

Editor's picks

Dragon Empress
While other women have been appointed empress, Wu Zetian is the only one to have ruled China in her own right. Find out how she clawed her way to power.

Battle of Sempach
Explore step-by-step how a plucky Swiss militia forced the Medieval might that was the Austrian Habsburg dynasty out of their mountains.

One's best friend
From the Queen's obsession with corgis to the tiger Emperor Nero rescued from Rome's fighting pits, discover the often deep relationships royals have with their pets.

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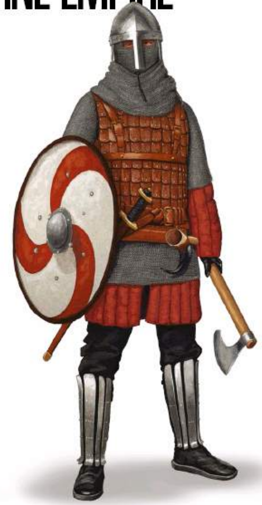

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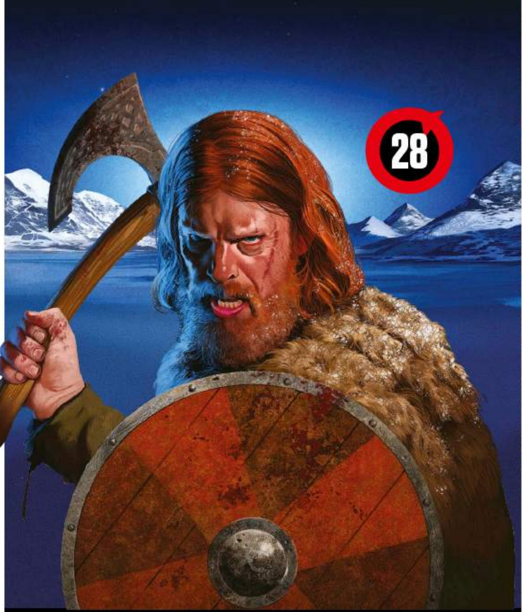

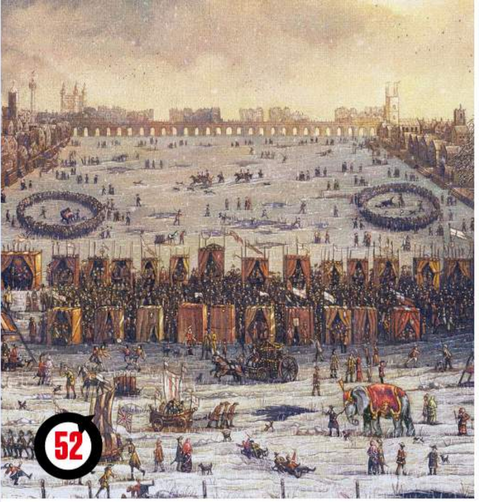

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Could a royal marriage have ended the Third Crusade and brought peace to the Middle East?

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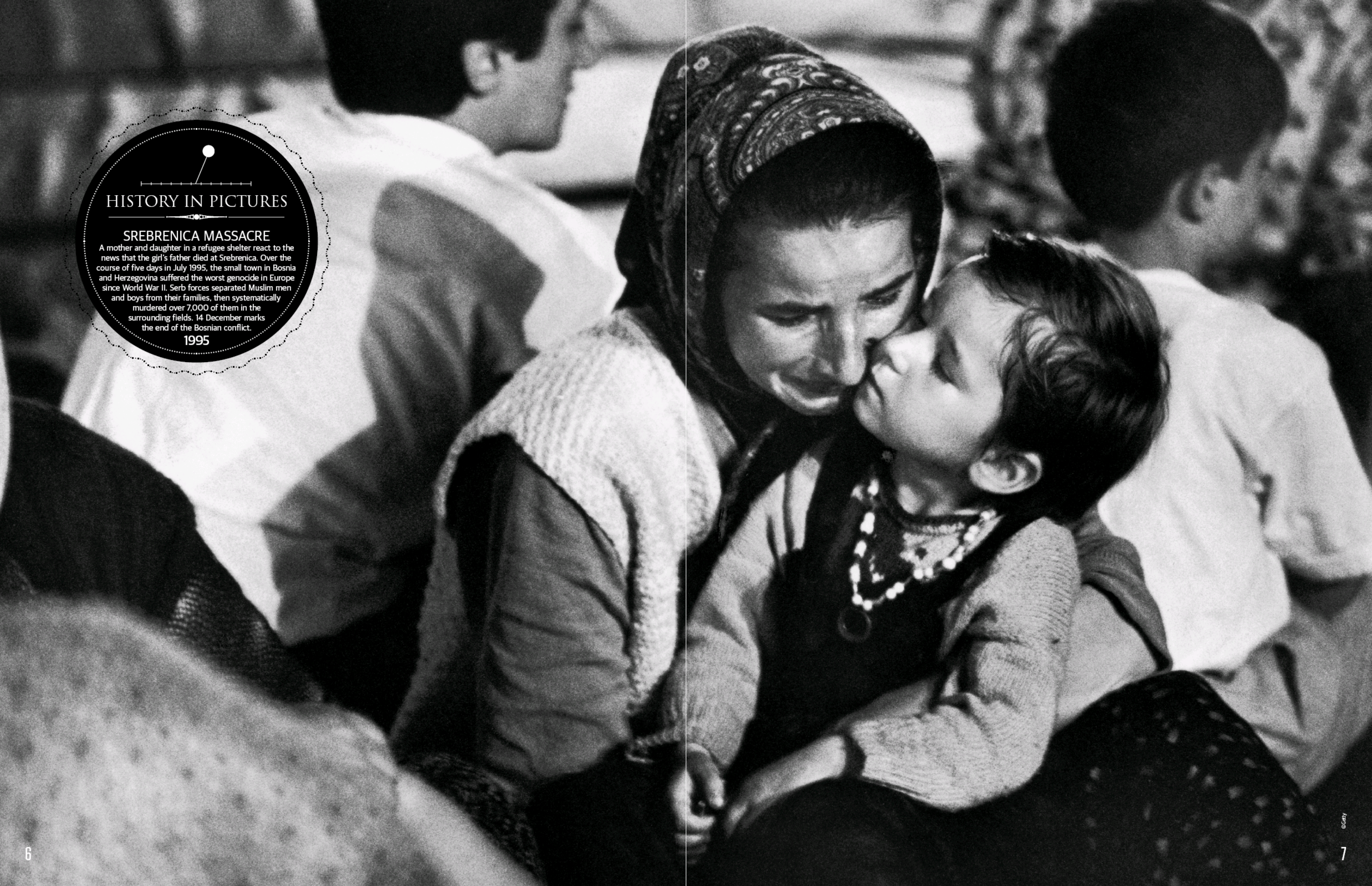

HISTORY IN PICTURES

SREBRENICA MASSACRE

A mother and daughter in a refugee shelter react to the news that the girl's father died at Srebrenica. Over the course of five days in July 1995, the small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered the worst genocide in Europe since World War II. Serb forces separated Muslim men and boys from their families, then systematically murdered over 7,000 of them in the surrounding fields. 14 December marks the end of the Bosnian conflict.

1995

©Getty

HISTORY IN COLOUR

THE KING OVER THE WATER

Four years after Edward VIII renounced the throne on 11 December 1936, the newly dubbed duke of Windsor was also made governor of the Bahamas. Serving from 1940 to 1945, he arrogantly dismissed the country as a "third-rate colony". But the British government may have appointed the duke to get him out of war-torn Europe, where he was accused of having fascist sympathies as well as being the target of several Nazi plots.

1945

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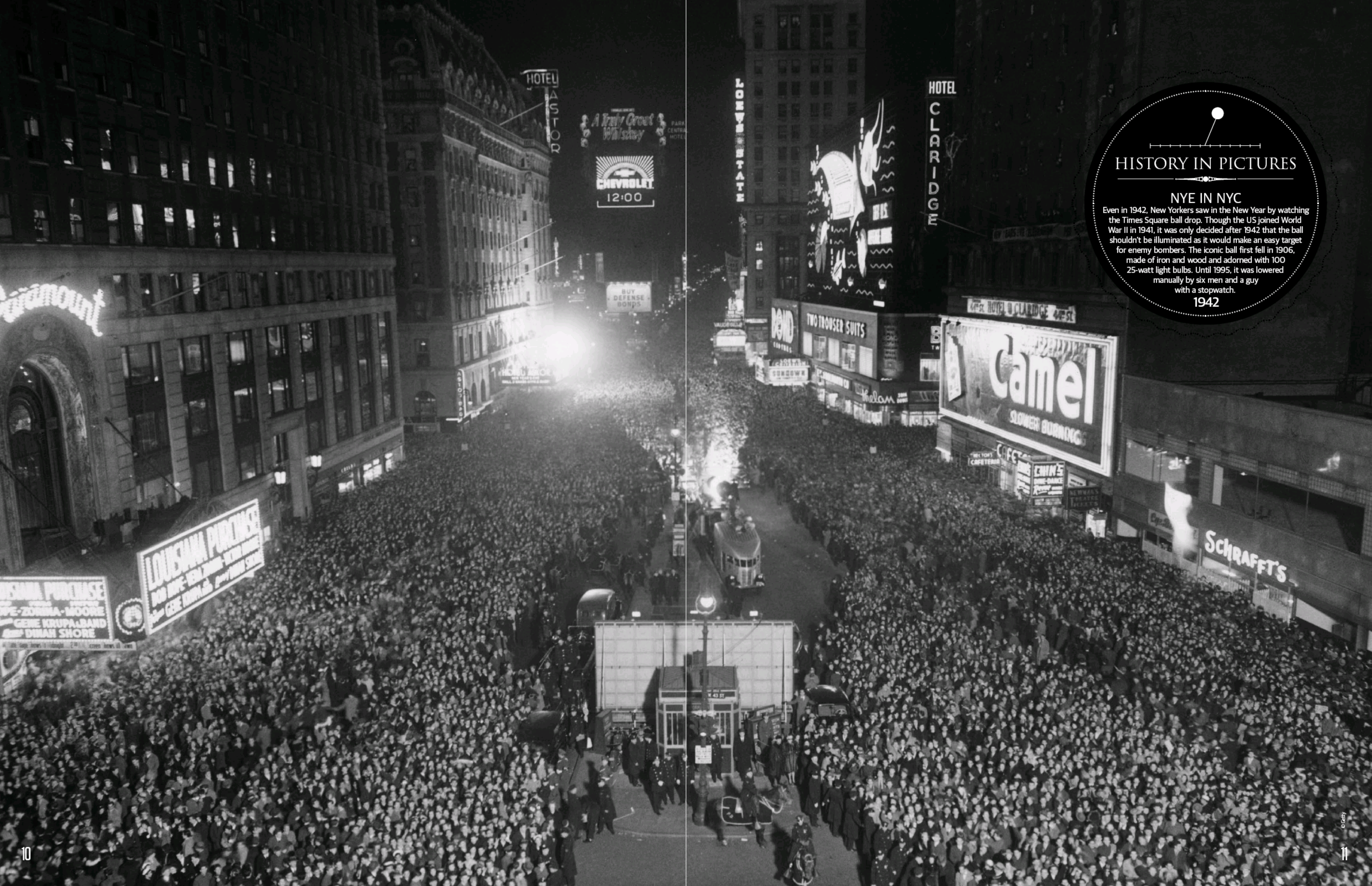
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BUY DEFENSE BONDS
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LOUISIANA PURCHASE
GENE KRUPA & BAND
DINAH SHORE
BOND
TWO TROUSER SUITS
Camel
SLOWER BURNING
CHIN'S
SCHRAFFT'S

HISTORY IN PICTURES

NYE IN NYC

Even in 1942, New Yorkers saw in the New Year by watching the Times Square ball drop. Though the US joined World War II in 1941, it was only decided after 1942 that the ball shouldn't be illuminated as it would make an easy target for enemy bombers. The iconic ball first fell in 1906, made of iron and wood and adorned with 100 25-watt light bulbs. Until 1995, it was lowered manually by six men and a guy with a stopwatch.

1942

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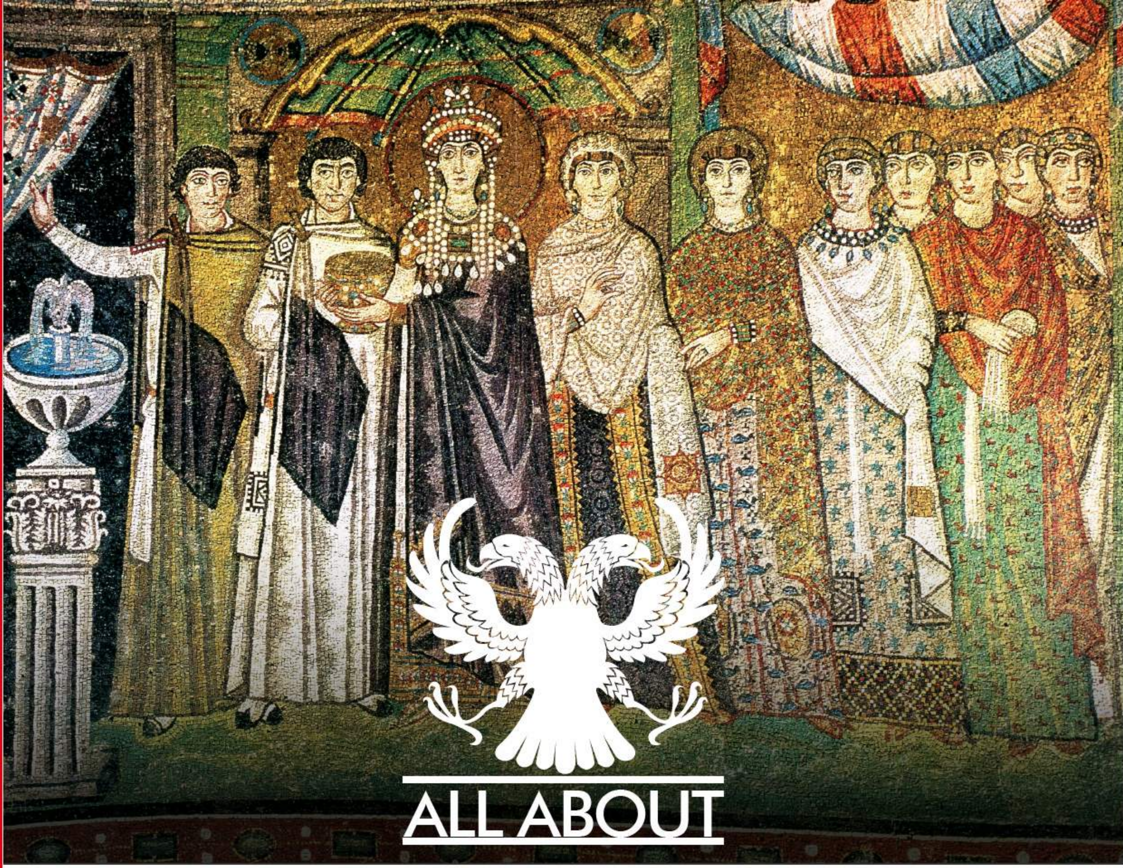

ALL ABOUT

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Find out how the Eastern Roman Empire endured until the Middle Ages, mixing Christian, Greek and Asian influences, producing glorious works of art and harnessing a secret weapon

Written by Tom Cohen, Jessica Leggett, Jack Parsons and Adam Rees

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Byzantine Empire

Uncover the extraordinary rise and fall of one of the world's greatest empires as it buckled under the weight of internal conflict and foreign invasions

Modern historians use the name 'Byzantine Empire' but the citizens identified themselves as Romans

BYZANTIUM IS BORN

Greek colonists founded a city on the European side of the Bosporus Strait. Strategically placed between Europe and Asia Minor, Byzantium prospered, though the Greeks and Persians warred over it many times.

657 BCE

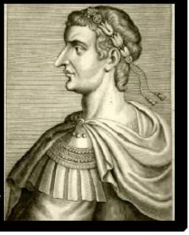
NEW ROME

Emperor Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium to better manage its eastern frontiers. Endowed by his name, the new capital was rechristened Constantinople.

330 CE

A PERMANENT SPLIT

Upon the death of Emperor Theodosius I, his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius, inherited the Eastern and the Western halves of the Roman Empire respectively. The empire would never be reunited.



395 CE

PAYING THE HUNS

Amount of gold the Byzantines paid the Huns annually to keep them at bay 159KG

318KG The tribute had doubled by 433 as Attila rose to power

The amount trebled in 443 after the empire was heavily defeated by the Huns 952KG

424-43 CE

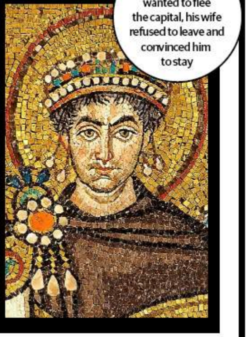
THE WEST FALLS

The overthrow of Romulus Augustus by the barbarian Odoacer marked the end of Western Roman Empire. However, Odoacer bent the knee to Constantinople and Eastern Rome endured for another 1,000 years.

476 CE

THE NIKA RIOTS

Justinian I's harsh treatment of hooligans at a chariot race, as well as anger at a recent tax hike, sparked five days of rioting that killed a tenth of Constantinople.



While Justinian wanted to flee the capital, his wife refused to leave and convinced him to stay

532

THE JUSTINIAN PLAGUE

25-50 MILLION Number of estimated deaths across the empire

10,000 Approximate number of deaths daily in Constantinople

3 Number of major outbreaks of bubonic plague with this being the first, followed by the Black Death and the Third Pandemic

541-42

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME!

Emperor Heraclius introduced Greek as the official language of the empire's administration. By the next generation, knowledge of Latin was rare, even among the educated.

620

RISE OF ICONOCLASM

Emperor Leo III made the veneration of religious icons illegal across the empire, something that continued after his death. This vexed the Western Church, which supported their use.

726-87

The period between iconoclasm and the sack of Constantinople was a high point for Byzantine art

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman emperor in an attempt to restore the Western Roman Empire. It frustrated the East, who felt that their power was being threatened.

800

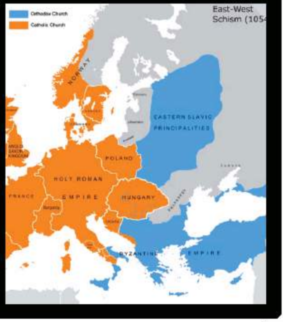
RESTORATION OF ICONS

After another period of iconoclasm took hold in 814, Empress Theodora, regent for her son Michael III, finally ended the practice. Her efforts led to her canonisation as a saint.

843

THE GREAT SCHISM

After years of disputes, the Church formally separated into the Roman Catholic Church in the West, led by Pope Leo IX, and the Greek Orthodox Church, which was based in Constantinople.



1054

SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE

After the Fourth Crusade helped put exiled Emperor Alexios IV on the throne, the Byzantines refused to pay. Angered, the Crusaders conquered the capital and established a new Latin Empire.

1204

PLUNDERING AWAY

20,000 Estimated number of men in the Crusader army

Number of ships used in the sacking 200

57 Number of years the Latin Empire survived

1204

RESTORED TO POWER

Emperor Michael VIII successfully recaptured Constantinople and caused the Latin Emperor, Baldwin II, to flee the city. Michael restored the capital, which had fallen into disrepair, back to its former grandeur.

1261

INTERNAL STRIFE

A series of civil wars among dynastic rivals during the reign of Emperor John V severely weakened the empire and left it vulnerable to attacks from enemies abroad.

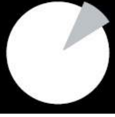
1321-79

POPULATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE

400,000 Estimated number of pre-plague inhabitants during the 6th century

70,000 Number of people who lived in the capital after its recapture during the 13th century

The population of the 15th century was just



10% of the size it was in the 6th

1400

END OF AN EMPIRE

The army of Sultan Mehmed II killed Emperor Constantine XI as the Ottoman Turks successfully captured the capital. The event marked the end of the Byzantine Empire.

1453

INSIDE HISTORY

HAGIA SOPHIA

TURKEY, 537 – PRESENT

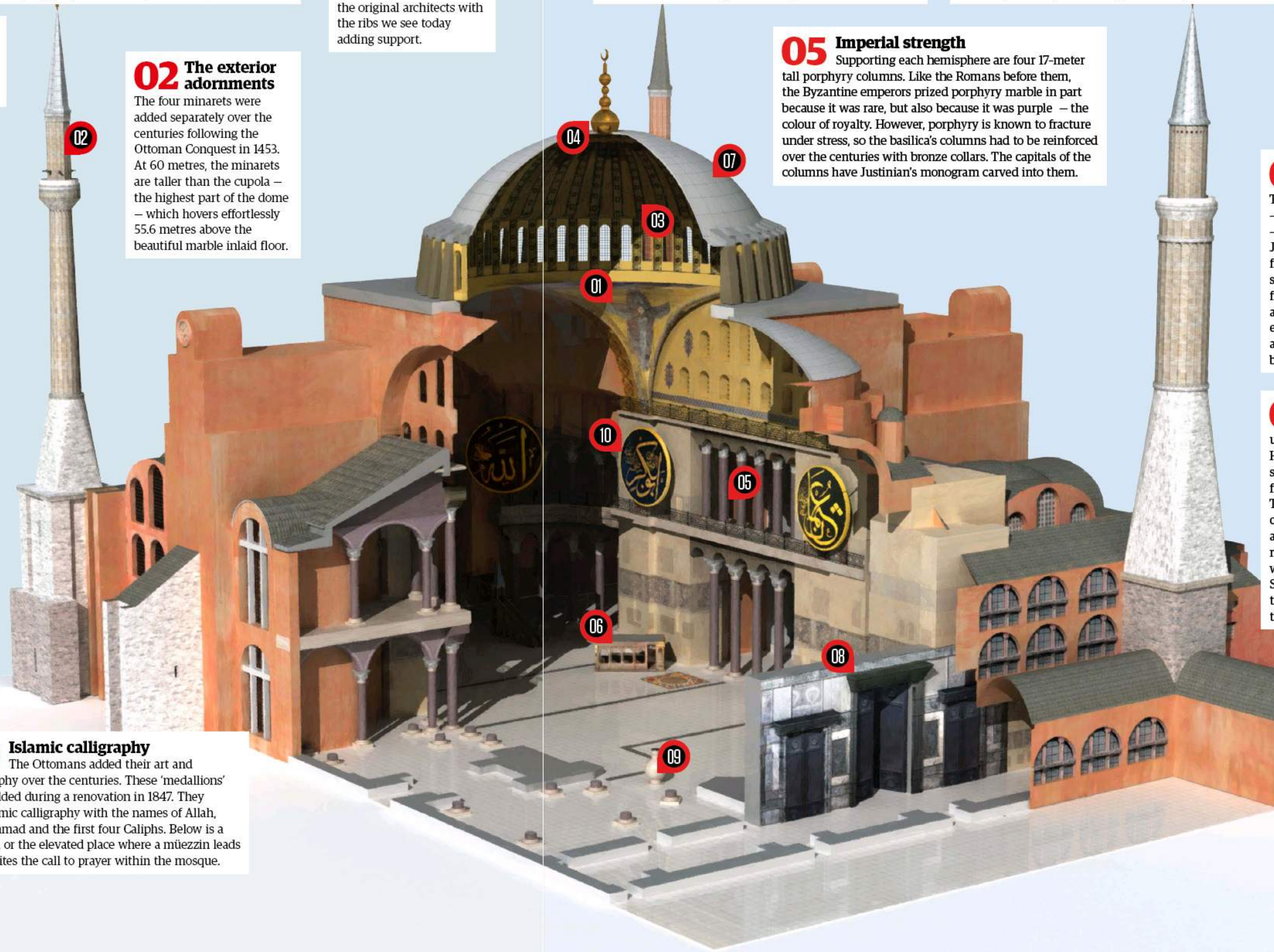
The site of Hagia Sophia has been a holy place for centuries. Constantine I built a church on the foundations of a pagan temple in 325 CE and this was restored and then extended several times. However, after the church was destroyed by fire during the Nika Riots in 532, Emperor Justinian I had a grand vision. Wanting to restore the empire to its former glory, he decided to build the greatest church the world had ever seen.

Justinian hired a pair of famed mathematicians, Anthemios and Isidore, to design it. In 537, just under six years later, the Hagia Sophia (meaning 'Holy Wisdom') was completed. Its enormous dome relied on a revolutionary design that made it the largest in the world for almost a millennium.

Despite its incredible design, the centuries were hard on the awe-inspiring church and subsequent Byzantine emperors used repairs as opportunities to add their name to it. Some were beautiful additions – for example, Justinian's successor Justin II covered the walls with intricate mosaics. However, not every ruler was a patron of the arts. In 726, Emperor Leo III, following a civil war, forbade religious icons and this iconoclasm continued until 842 and saw the destruction of religious icons in churches across the land.

As the Byzantine Empire slowly collapsed, Islamic ones like the Ottomans replaced it. This threat prompted Western Christian nations to crusade and reclaim the 'Holy Land'. The Crusades never achieved long-term success, however, and even catalysed the fall of Constantinople in 1453 when Ottoman sultan Mehmed the Conqueror took the city. Fortunately, he was struck by the beauty of Hagia Sophia and he made Constantinople his capital. Hagia Sophia (now called Aya Sofya) was converted into a mosque and its Christian art was covered or replaced with Islamic calligraphy. Hagia Sophia's beauty would inspire the next generation of Ottoman art.

When the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I, the secular nation of Turkey was created and Hagia Sophia became a museum, which you can still visit today in modern-day Istanbul.



01 Squaring the circle

What gives Hagia Sophia its beauty is the revolutionary way in which the architects created an immense open space. It is a dome built upon two semi-domes. In order to do this, it was necessary to 'square the circle', which means to build a circular dome upon the square base. Hagia Sophia was one of the first structures to make use of this technique. Byzantine paintings of six-winged angels called seraphs (Greek: hexapterygon) still line the pendentives.

02 The exterior adornments

The four minarets were added separately over the centuries following the Ottoman Conquest in 1453. At 60 metres, the minarets are taller than the cupola – the highest part of the dome – which hovers effortlessly 55.6 metres above the beautiful marble inlaid floor.

03 A miracle of construction

A marvel of engineering, Hagia Sophia was originally completed only five years after construction began. But 20 years later the dome collapsed and was repaired by the nephew of one of the original architects with the ribs we see today adding support.

04 Christian and Islamic fusion

Both the Byzantines and the Ottomans removed Christian mosaics at different times and replaced them with nonrepresentational art like calligraphy and geometric shapes. The Islamic calligraphy inside the dome probably covers an original Byzantine mosaic. A surviving mosaic of a Christ Pantocrator, the so-called Deësis mosaic, probably dates from the 13th century and is considered one of the finest examples of late Byzantine mosaics.

05 Imperial strength

Supporting each hemisphere are four 17-meter tall porphyry columns. Like the Romans before them, the Byzantine emperors prized porphyry marble in part because it was rare, but also because it was purple – the colour of royalty. However, porphyry is known to fracture under stress, so the basilica's columns had to be reinforced over the centuries with bronze collars. The capitals of the columns have Justinian's monogram carved into them.

06 Doge Dandolo's tomb

Hagia Sophia started out as a Greek Orthodox church. Then the Fourth Crusade, led by Venetians in 1204, sacked Constantinople and turned it into a Catholic one until the Byzantines returned in 1261. In 1453, the Ottomans turned it into a mosque, which it remained until 1934 when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk ordered it to be turned into a museum. A reminder of the Venetian Crusade, Dandolo, the 41st doge of Venice, is buried here.

07 The greatest temple ever built

Even today, when one gazes into the ancient dome, one is left speechless in its awe-inspiring space and history spanning centuries. Fortunately, the Byzantine emperor Justinian had the words, comparing it favourably with the biblical First Temple in Jerusalem, saying, "O, Solomon, I have outdone thee!"

08 Knock on the emperor door

This seven-metre-high doorway – the largest in Hagia Sophia – was originally reserved for Justinian and his retinue. Made from oak and bronze, Byzantine sources claimed the wood was from Noah's Ark. A mosaic above the door was added in either the 9th or 10th century and depicts Emperor Leo VI bowing in respect to Christ.

09 Lustration urns

Two large marble urns flank the entrance to Hagia Sophia. Hellenistic in style, they were each carved from single chunks of marble. These originally would have contained water that was used as part of a Roman purification ritual called lustratio. They were added to Hagia Sophia by Sultan Murad III, who brought them to the monument from the city of Pergamon.

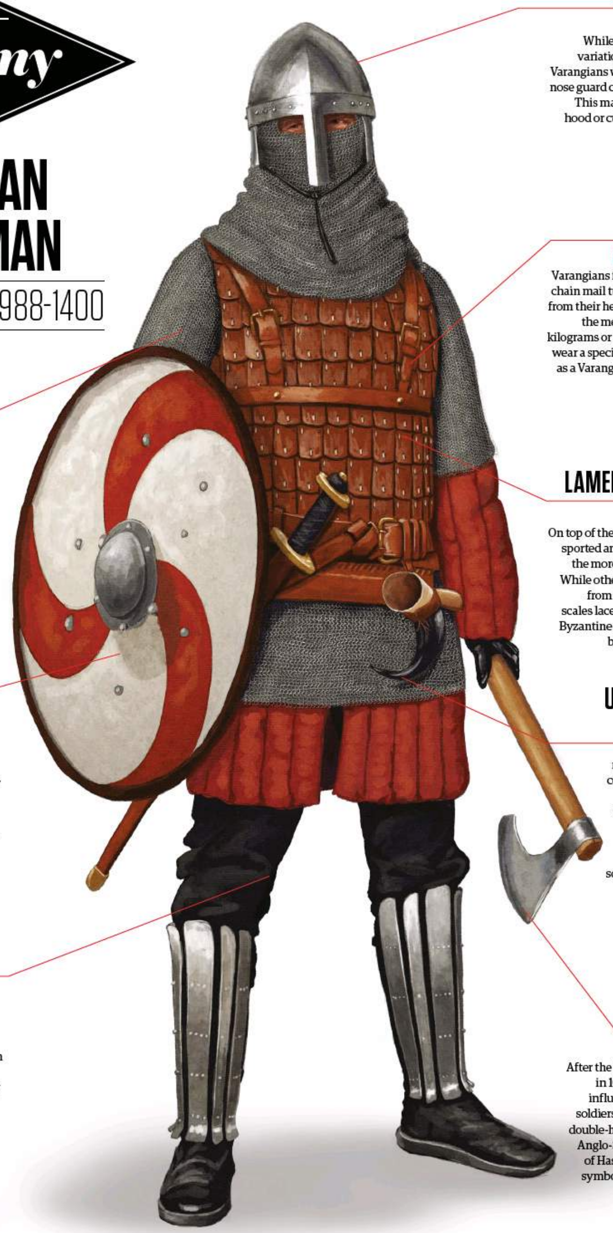
10 Islamic calligraphy

The Ottomans added their art and calligraphy over the centuries. These 'medallions' were added during a renovation in 1847. They are Islamic calligraphy with the names of Allah, Muhammad and the first four Caliphs. Below is a minbar, or the elevated place where a müezzin leads and recites the call to prayer within the mosque.

© Adrian Mann

THE *Anatomy of* VARANGIAN GUARDSMAN

CONSTANTINOPLE, 988-1400



ELITE WARRIORS

VIKINGS FOR HIRE

Basil II formed the Varangian Guard in 988 to put down a rebellion. The force was made up of Rus warriors, the descendents of Vikings who had settled in modern-day Russia and Ukraine. Some straight-up Vikings also served in the Byzantine force, such as Harald Hardrada, who was a Varangian commander before reigning as king of Norway from 1046-66. Over time, the guards evolved from a band of unruly mercenaries to a loyal elite.

BODYGUARDS

THE EMPEROR'S SHIELD

A lot more than a palace guard, the Varangians' worth was fully utilised as a strike force in conflicts throughout the Byzantine Empire. Whether at the vanguard, protecting the emperor or baggage train, on the sea or the battlements during Constantinople's many sieges, the Guard put their weapons, including their round shields, to the test.

STANDARDISED UNIFORM

IMPERIAL ISSUE

While the Varangian Guard would have been drawn from all over the world – many other mercenaries joined their ranks beyond the Rus, Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons – their uniform was standardised and issued by the imperial armoury. In part, this was possibly because many of the exiles that joined the Guard arrived with nothing, so required the empire to clothe them.

CONICAL HELMET

HEAVY IS THE HEAD

While there may have been some variation, it seems likely that most Varangians wore conical helmets with a nose guard chinstrap in a Western style. This may have also included a mail hood or curtain for added protection.

VARANGIAN BRA

HEAVY ARMOUR SUPPORT

Varangians famously wore a full-length chain mail tunic that would cover them from their head to their knees. However, the metal hauberk could weigh 12 kilograms or more, so the soldiers would wear a special leather harness – known as a Varangian bra – to take the weight off their shoulders.

LAMELLAR SCALE VEST

RIVETING DISPLAY

On top of the chain mail, the Varangians sported an extra layer of protection in the more stylish lamellar scale vest. While other lamellar vests were made from the rows of leather or metal scales laced together, the plates of the Byzantine designs were riveted onto a backing for extra sturdiness.

UNDERGARMENTS

DYED IN THE WOOL

While Byzantine military manuals don't mention any colours, many mosaics show the guards wearing purple cloaks and undergarments. However, this expensive colour was the preserve of the emperor in Byzantine society. Instead, it is far more likely that the Varangians joined the rest of the emperors' entourage in wearing red cloaks.

BATTLEAXE

AXE TO GRIND

After the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066, the Varangians saw an influx of displaced Anglo-Saxon soldiers join their ranks. Hence the double-handed axe, so popular with Anglo-Saxon warriors at the Battle of Hastings, became a prominent symbol and weapon of the Guard.

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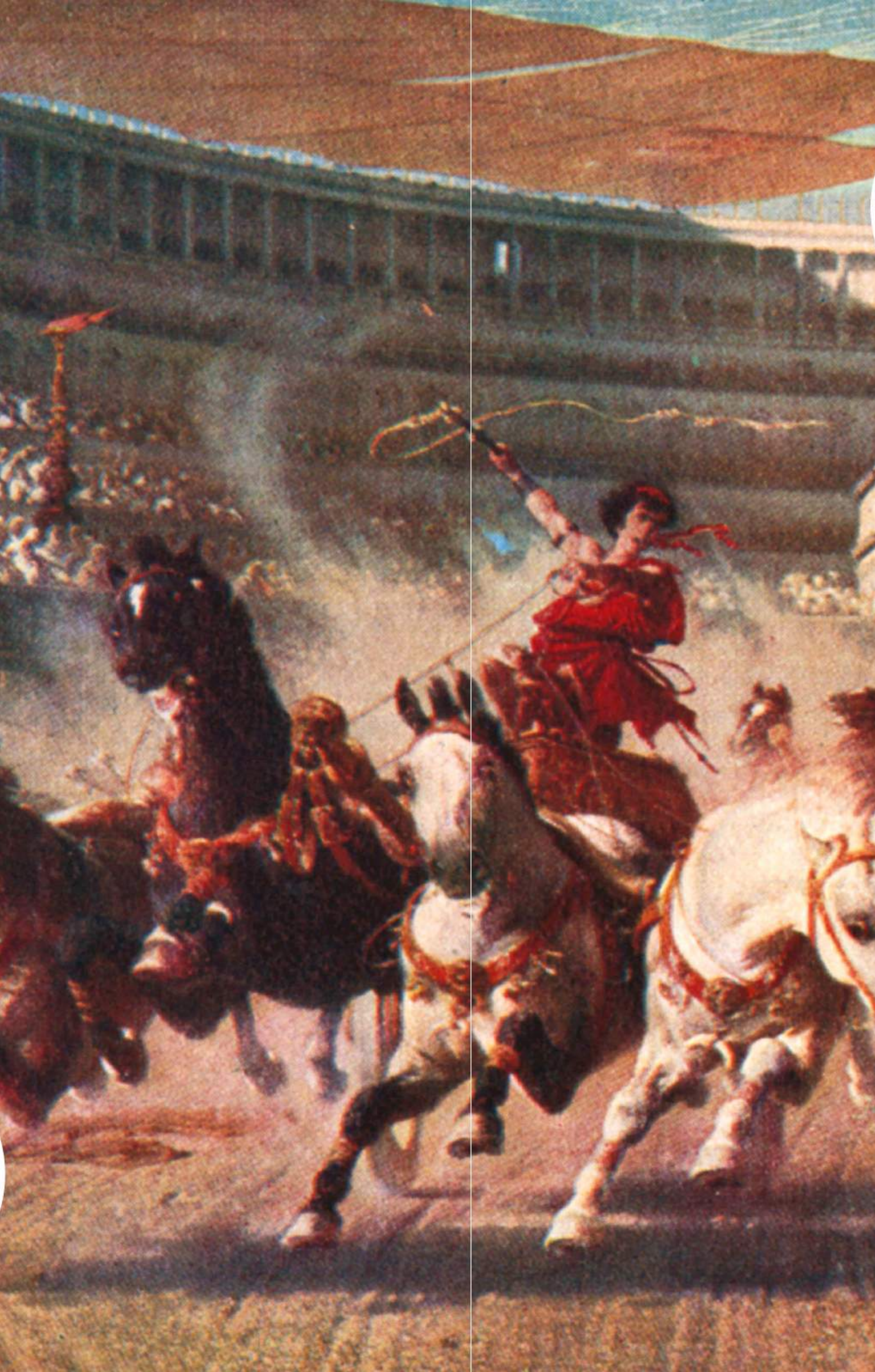
Day in the life

CHARIOT RACER

CHARIOT RACERS DREAMED OF GLORY AND SUCCESS IN THE HIPPODROME

BYZANTINE EMPIRE, 500-42

Chariot racing was the most popular spectator sport in the Byzantine Empire. Races took place in Constantinople's Hippodrome circus, which could seat up to 100,000 people at once. Spectators from all classes, including the emperor, enjoyed the games as a distraction from their daily life while the racers themselves were normally slaves. The racers were divided into four team, which inspired the same fierce loyalty as modern football teams. In fact, fans of rival teams often brawled in the aisles. The races were also a prime opportunity for the emperor to present himself to the public, something that otherwise rarely occurred.



PRE-GAME SHOW

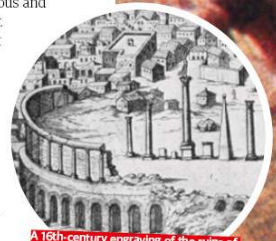
As the racers arrived to prepare for a day of competing, a wide array of entertainments were put on for the spectators to enjoy like wrestling, dancing, juggling, tightrope walks and wild beast fights. The emperor and his consort would be seated in their booth, called a Kathisma, which was directly linked to the Great Palace.

REPRESENT THE TEAM

There were four factions that raced in the Hippodrome – Blue, Green, Red and White. Racers would wear tunics that sported the colour of their team so that the crowd could easily identify them. Out of the four, it was the Blue and Green teams that were the most prominent, with the Red and White teams seen as the secondary factions.

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Chariot races were extremely dangerous and racers needed to wear protective gear. Leather pads for the thighs and chest were common along with leather helmets. A sharp knife was also a must in case the chariot's reigns became entangled and the racer needed to cut himself free.



A 16th-century engraving of the ruins of the Hippodrome, showing the remains of the chariot racing circuit

PLAY FAIR

Lots were drawn to determine which of the 12 starting gates, known as carceres, the racers would go from. The gates were mechanised to ensure that they would all open at the same time. The four horse chariots were readied and brought to the gates and each team usually had two chariots participating in every race.

The spina was adorned with monuments such as the Obelisk of Thutmose III. Emperor Theodosius I moved it to the Hippodrome from Egypt in 390 CE

READY, SET, GO

A wealthy sponsor for the chariots, such as a senator or even the emperor, would drop a white cloth to signal the beginning of the race. The charioteers would have to ride to the end of the U-shaped track, wheel around the spina in the centre and back again to win. Each race required seven laps and lasted around 15 minutes.

LUNCHTIME

There was a break midway through the day for food and drink, with more entertainment brought out for the spectators in the meantime. It was also an opportunity for the racers to recuperate and ready themselves for the afternoon. This was not just about victory – success in the Hippodrome could propel racers to stardom.

IN IT TO WIN IT

After lunch, the races would continue with up to 24 performed each day. A moveable scoreboard, which had seven dolphin- or egg-shaped lap counters, kept track of the score. Racers would team up to get rid of the first-place racer, usually by knocking into their carriage – an extremely dangerous and deadly move.

WANT A REMATCH?

Unique to Byzantine chariot racing was the honour of the 'diversium', which allowed the winner to challenge the loser to a rematch with swapped chariots and horses. It was an opportunity for the victor to prove to the crowd that they had won the races based on skill, rather than luck.

COLLECT THE PRIZE

The winning chariot racer received their prize from the emperor, which consisted of a gold seal, a tunic, a helmet and a silk belt. The racer's victory was ultimately the emperor's and during the prize ceremony the crowd would shout their allegiance to him. For the racer, winning gave him the chance to switch teams and increase his income.

TIME TO PARTY

After the day's events, the factions celebrated or commiserated. There was frequent conflict among the different teams and supporters since chariot racing promoted a mob-like mentality, not too dissimilar to football hooliganism seen today. For this reason the scholar Procopius declared the racing factions "a sickness of the soul."

© Getty Images

How to WIN A WAR WITH GREEK FIRE

DEFEND THE BYZANTINE CAPITAL BY SEARING ENEMY SHIPS WITH THIS FEARSOME INCENDIARY TO BURN YOUR WAY TO VICTORY CONSTANTINOPLE, 673-1453

Greek fire was the most feared weapon in Medieval warfare. An incendiary chemical, it would set fire spontaneously, stick to wood and flesh, and couldn't be extinguished by water. While pitch and oil-soaked projectiles were used extensively in the Middle Ages, Greek fire was the sole preserve of the Byzantine Empire, its composition a closely guarded secret.

It's thought to have been invented in the 7th century by Jewish refugee Kallinikos of Heliopolis. Thrown in pots or pumped through tubes, it helped repulse many sieges on Constantinople. In fact, its deadliness has been cited as the reason for the empire's long reign.

Dragon head

How do you make such a terrifying weapon even more frightening? Have it be spewed forth from the head of a mythical beast, of course, or at least from behind the protection of a metal shield.

Fuse

The substance is no good unless it's on fire. A fuse at the end of the nozzle will ignite it as it's launched.

Pump

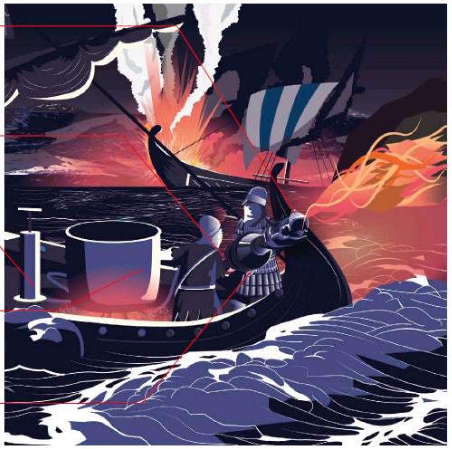
The trigger of the flamethrower is a pump that you will need to push up and down, propelling the Greek fire out in bursts.

Cauldron

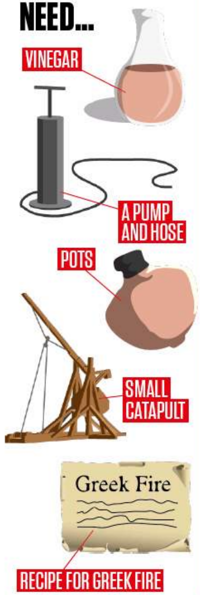
The heated metal container where the lethal substance is kept, ready to be sprayed out in an inferno onto the Byzantines' enemies.

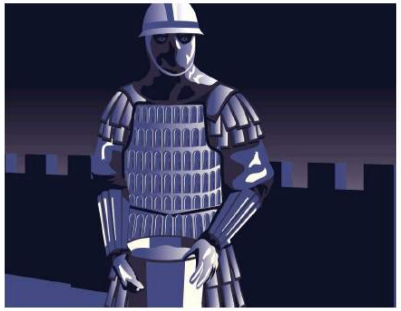
Bronze nozzle

An adjustable mouthpiece with which to direct the Greek fire onto the ships and soldiers of enemy forces.



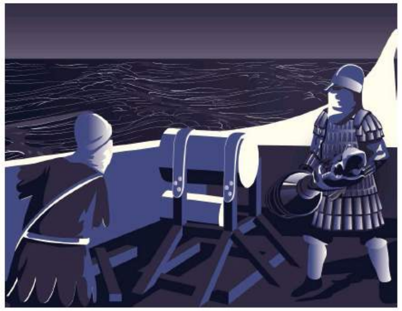
WHAT YOU'LL NEED...





01 SAFETY CHECK

When the weapon you're using is the Dark Age equivalent of a napalm payload, it's probably best to do a health and safety check. The best practice is to wear leather clothes dowsed in vinegar or, if you're really desperate, some old urine. Do the same to whatever surface you're stood on and make sure there's a bucket of sand at hand just in case things go awry.



02 SET A TRAP

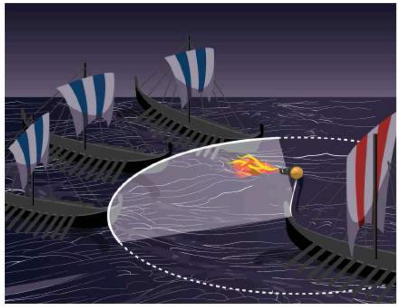
One of the downsides of Greek fire is that it only has a range of about six metres, so we'll need to draw in the enemy fleet in order to give them the full effect of our homemade secret recipe. Fitting flame-throwing hoses to the fore and aft of 15 old ships should be enough to tempt 1,000 Rus ships, shouldn't it?

How not to... win with Greek fire

While the threat of Greek fire itself was a deterrent to most invading forces, it struck little fear in the hearts of the Ottomans in 1453 as it hadn't been used in centuries. In fact, the Ottoman Empire managed to conquer Constantinople once and for all, renaming it Istanbul and using it as their own capital.

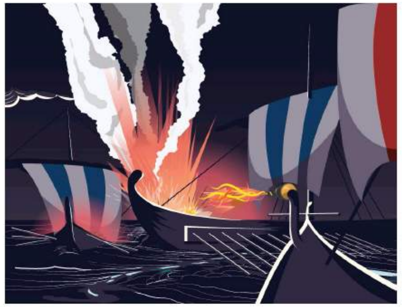
Though the Ottomans had developed their own version of Greek fire, the successful siege condemned not only the Byzantine Empire but also the secret of its most feared weapon to the history books.

To this day, its exact composition remains a mystery to the world. Although the recipe was passed down from emperor to emperor throughout the Byzantine Empire, it was never written down lest it fall into enemy hands and be used against them in battle.



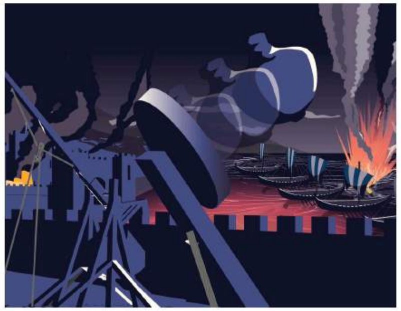
03 ALL HANDS TO THE PUMPS

Don't let the hard work of the surprise be ruined. Though it's a pretty daunting site, let the Rus' ships come in as close as possible. Then, when they're near enough to hear their premature victorious calls, press down on those pumps and let them have a taste. It also makes a savage noise and plumes of black smoke to add to the terror.



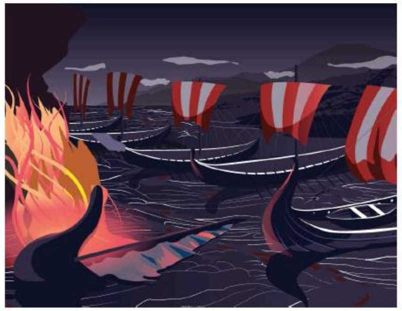
04 NO NEED FOR ACCURACY

Obviously it's best to aim for the ships that should catch fire pretty quickly and it will only get worse for the panicked crew when they try in vain to put it out with water. You needn't worry if some goes in the sea – it'll still burn and make sure those who abandon their ships get a good roasting while they try to swim away.



05 LET OTHERS JOIN IN

Some of the enemy will try and escape the inferno, so make sure you give the men on the seaward ramparts the opportunity to have some fun. Even if you don't have enough hoses, small jars filled with Greek fire with a nice burning wick will make a vicious Medieval Molotov cocktail for them to throw or launch via a catapult.



06 OLD-FASHIONED WARFARE

Though Greek fire is an unrivalled weapon, its range and limited supply means it can only inflict so much damage and fear. With the enemy in disarray, it's up to the rest of the army and navy to capitalise and finish off the invaders. Any who escape can help spread the news that the emperor and his secret weapon are not to be messed with.

4 FAMOUS... TIMES GREEK FIRE WAS USED

SIEGE OF THE CAPITAL

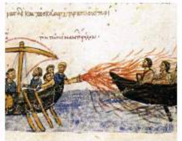
678

The besieging forces of the Umayyad Caliphate were the first to experience Greek fire when their navy was set ablaze.

ARABIAN ATTACK

718

Despite a relentless invasion from Arab forces, Emperor Leo III's navy were victorious thanks to Greek fire.



THOMAS THE SLAV

822

Both sides had Greek fire at their disposal but it was the Emperor Michael II who used it best during the revolt of Thomas the Slav.

WAR WITH THE RUS

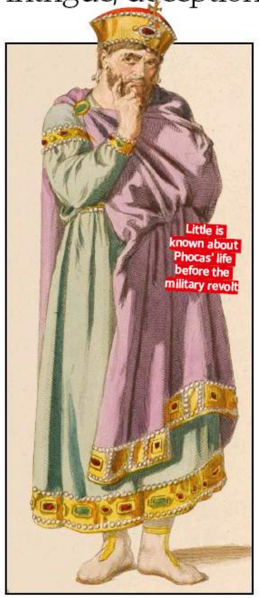
941

Emperor Romanus I Lecapenus successfully defeated the invading Russian fleet at sea with his favourite fiery weapon.

© Ed Crooks

Hall of Fame
MURDEROUS RULERS

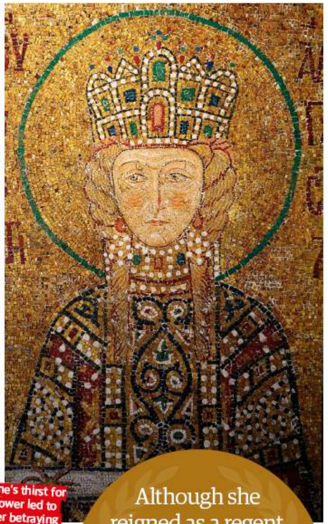
At the heart of the Byzantine Empire was a monarchy that survived on intrigue, deception and bloodthirsty violence


Little is known about Phocas' life before the military revolt

PHOCAS

NON-DYNASTIC C.547-610

Phocas was a member of the army during the reign of Emperor Maurice. A bloody military revolt against Maurice led to his execution and as a vocal opponent of the emperor, Phocas was crowned as the new ruler. Civil war ensued and aristocratic landowners were angered as Phocas stripped them of their power and influence. There were revolts all over the empire as factions sprung up determined to remove the usurper. Constantinople was seized and Phocas was promptly beheaded.

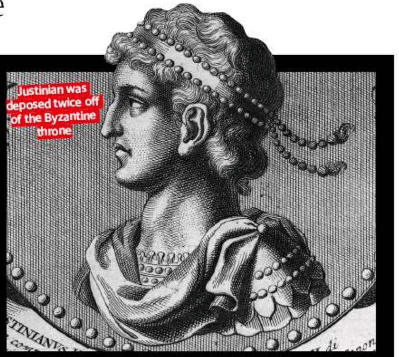

Irene's thirst for power led to her betraying her own son

IRENE

ISAURIAN DYNASTY C.752-803

Irene was thrust into a power when she became regent for her son, Constantine VI, after her husband's sudden death in 780. She developed a taste for power and refused to relinquish control to her son for many years, who finally declared himself emperor in 790. Popular support allowed Irene to become Constantine's co-ruler in 792 and by 797 she had successfully deposed him. Irene even had Constantine blinded to prevent him from returning to power. However, Irene's desire to rule alone and refusal to remarry ultimately led to her downfall and deposition in 802. She died impoverished one year later.

> Although she reigned as a regent and co-emperor beforehand, Irene was the first female to rule the Byzantine Empire entirely by herself


Justinian was deposed twice off of the Byzantine throne

JUSTINIAN II

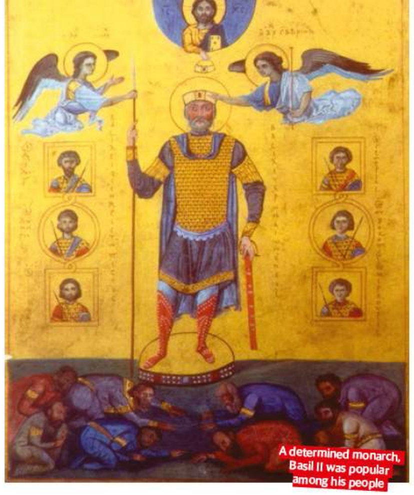
HERACLIAN DYNASTY C.668-711

Justinian's reign was chaotic to say the least. After years of heavy taxation and conflict with the Church, he was deposed in 695. Justinian was mutilated in an attempt to stop him from regaining the throne, by having his nose cut off. This led to his moniker, 'rhinotmetos' ('slit-nosed'), and he supposedly wore a gold prosthetic. The former emperor plotted his return while in exile, seeking the help of the Khazars, and he was restored to the throne in 705. Cruel and repressive, Justinian only ruled for six years before he was deposed again and executed outside Constantinople.

BASIL I **MACEDONIAN DYNASTY 811-86**

Though from humble origins, Basil earned the friendship and patronage of Emperor Michael III, who eventually crowned him co-emperor. Basil was a great manipulator and committed a series of murders to clear his path to the throne. When he sensed that Michael's favour for him was waning, he brutally murdered the emperor and his relatives. As ruler, he oversaw a series of conquests that turned the Byzantine Empire into the most dominant power in Europe.

Basil I had the ultimate rise with his rags-to-riches story


A determined monarch, Basil II was popular among his people

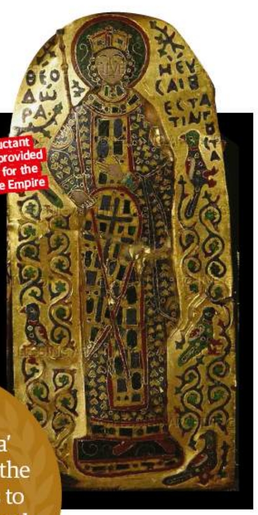
BASIL II **MACEDONIAN DYNASTY 958-1025**

Basil the Bulgar-Slayer earned his name after conquering Bulgaria. Merciless and brutal, he blinded the 15,000 Bulgarian soldiers that he captured. In a macabre gesture, he left one eye for every hundred men, so they could lead the others home. Basil was popular with the army, which he joined on campaign instead of barking orders from the safety of his palace. Basil was a shrewd ruler, limiting the power of wealthy landowners after they dared to revolt against him. Despite numerous military campaigns, the economy flourished throughout his reign, and when he died the empire was left with a vast territory.

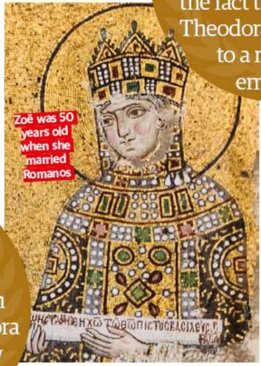
THEODORA PORPHYROGENITA

MACEDONIAN DYNASTY C.980-1056

Empress Theodora was more suited to governing than her sister Zoë, which was proven when she had Michael V blinded to stop him reclaiming power. She lived with her sister's jealousy for years and was confined to a monastery during the Romanos' reign. When Zoë was restored to the throne, Theodora was reluctantly crowned beside her. After the deaths of Zoë and her husband, their co-ruler Constantine IX, Theodora ruled alone and the Macedonian dynasty ended with her.


The reluctant empress provided stability for the Byzantine Empire

> The name 'Porphyrogenita' means 'born into the purple' – it refers to the fact that Zoë and Theodora were born to a reigning emperor


Zoë was 50 years old when she married Romanos

ZOË PORPHYROGENITA

MACEDONIAN DYNASTY C.978-1050

As a daughter of Constantine VIII, Zoë was next in the Byzantine line of succession. She was known for having numerous love affairs and was rumoured to have killed her first husband, Romanos III, either by drowning or poisoning him. She married her lover, Michael, on the very same day but was then removed from political power until his death as he was afraid that she would turn on him. An uprising against his heir and nephew, Michael V, led to Zoë being restored to the throne alongside her sister Theodora, who promptly took control. A vain woman, Zoë had little interest in governing but resented Theodora for her authority and ability to rule.

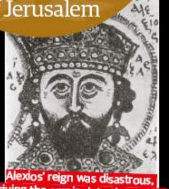
> Andronicus was a womaniser and had numerous affairs, including with Manuel's niece Theodora Komnene, the widow of King Baldwin III of Jerusalem

ANDRONICUS I COMNENUS

KOMNENOI DYNASTY C.1118-85

Initally popular, Andronicus's brutality quickly cemented his own downfall

Andronicus overthrew Empress Maria because of her unpopular favouritism towards Latins – she was the wife of his deceased cousin Manuel I and regent for her son Alexios II. Andronicus forced Alexios to sign his mother's death warrant and eventually had the boy killed. His accession sparked a widespread massacre of Latins within Constantinople, which he did nothing stop. Initially popular, Andronicus became tyrannical and the population revolted. He attempted to escape but was ultimately captured, tortured and killed.


Alexios' reign was disastrous, driving the empire into the ground

ALEXIOS III

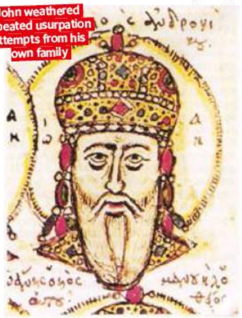
ANGELOS DYNASTY C.1153-1211

Alexios overthrew his younger brother Isaac II, who he blinded and imprisoned. A weak and extravagant man, Alexios spent money like water and depleted the treasury. His ability to govern was poor and he relied heavily on his capable wife, Euphrosyne. It all fell apart when Isaac's son and Alexios' nephew, the future Alexios IV, appealed to the Fourth Crusade for their help in restoring him to the throne. The empire was easy pickings for the Crusaders as Alexios' poor governance had left it in a complete state. Alexios fled abroad in the night and later died in a monastery.

JOHN V PALAEOLOGUS

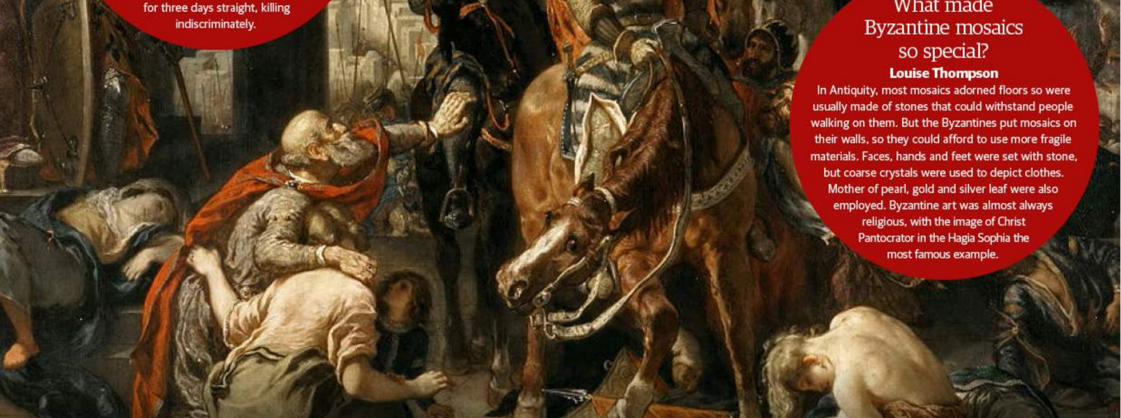
PALAIOLOGOS DYNASTY 1332-91

Although not a murderous man, John's reign was dominated by violence and rebellion. Ascending to the throne as a young boy, the empire was plunged into a civil war over his regency. John managed to overthrow his regent, his father's old aide, a few years later following a second civil war. He was deposed twice – first by his son and then by his grandson. John managed to regain the throne both times but was forced to appease his sons with titles.


John weathered repeated usurpation attempts from his own family

© Mary Evans Picture Library, Getty Images

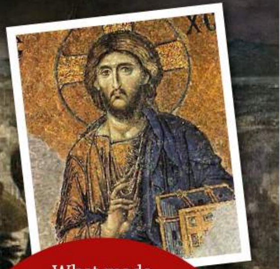
HISTORY ANSWERS



Why did the Crusaders invade Constantinople?

Eliot Issacs

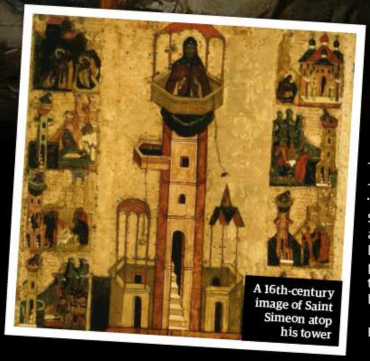
The Byzantine Empire was a Christian state, so it might seem odd that Crusaders sacked its capital in 1204 – in fact, it was regarded as a betrayal of principles out of greed. The Fourth Crusade were offered a reward by the exiled Byzantine prince Alexius if they put him on the throne. The Crusaders did so but the new emperor, now Alexius IV Angelus, was quickly murdered. The next ruler refused to pay the Crusaders, so they looted the city for three days straight, killing indiscriminately.



What made Byzantine mosaics so special?

Louise Thompson

In Antiquity, most mosaics adorned floors so were usually made of stones that could withstand people walking on them. But the Byzantines put mosaics on their walls, so they could afford to use more fragile materials. Faces, hands and feet were set with stone, but coarse crystals were used to depict clothes. Mother of pearl, gold and silver leaf were also employed. Byzantine art was almost always religious, with the image of Christ Pantocrator in the Hagia Sophia the most famous example.



A 16th-century image of Saint Simeon atop his tower

Did all Byzantine monks stand on pillars? **Josh Leary**

Stylitism (from the Greek 'stylos' meaning 'pillar') was a form of Christian worship in which a holy man would live atop a column, preaching, fasting and praying. A rail prevented them falling off and some had a small roof above their heads, though the aim was to suffer as the stylites believed this would ensure the salvation of their souls.

Stylites were common in the early days of Byzantine Empire but the practise was far from universally embraced. Saint Simeon the Elder (pictured right) was the first to take residence on a pillar in Aleppo, then part of the Byzantines' dominion, in 423 CE. He stayed up there until his death 36 years later. While his first pole was two metres high, it was later extended to 15 metres.

Saint Simeon's disciple Saint Daniel took stylitism to Constantinople, where the city's archbishop ordained him and both Emperor Leo I and Emperor Zeno visited him.

Next month's topic: Steam trains. Send your questions to **Facebook** /AllAboutHistory **Twitter** @AboutHistoryMag

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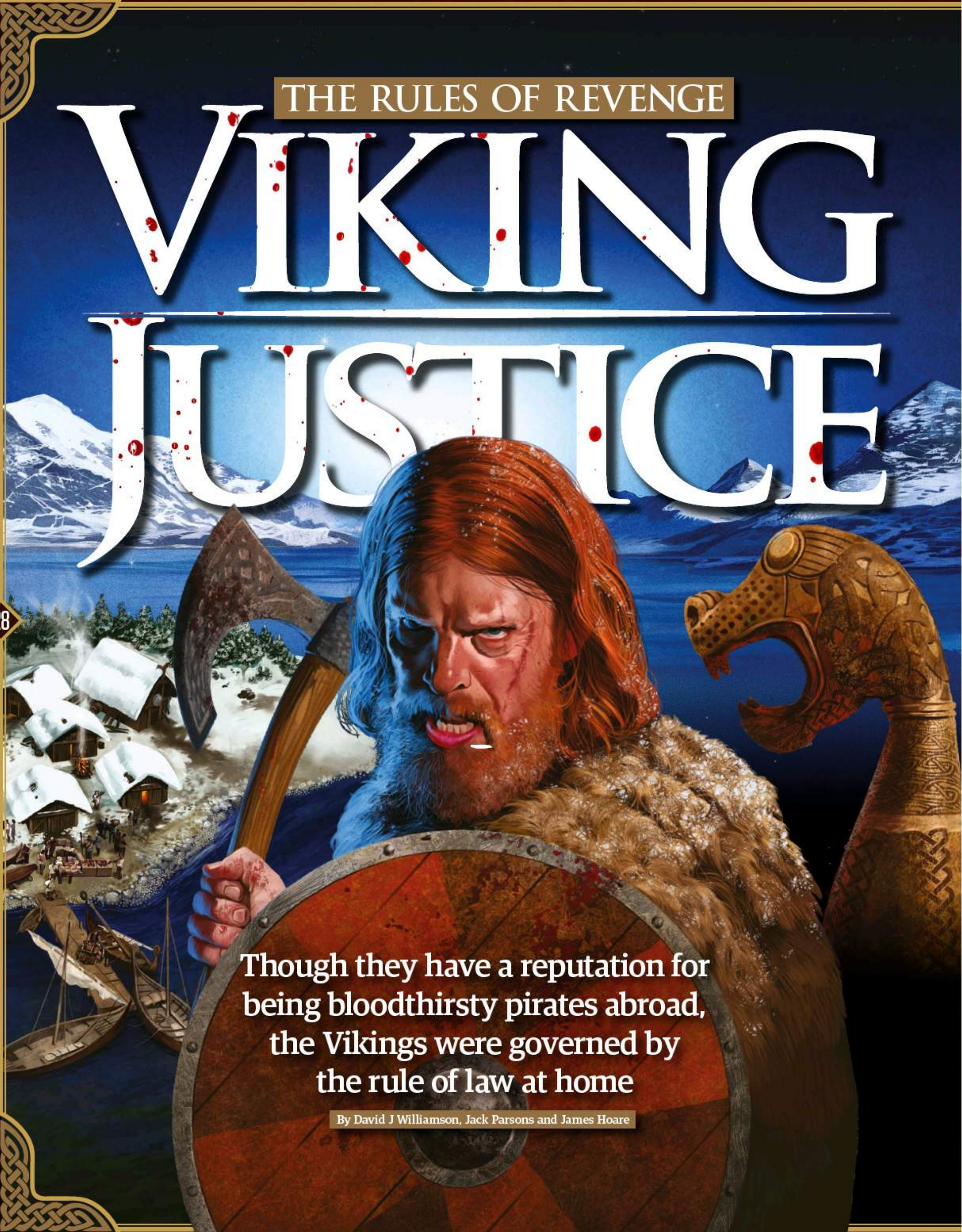


THE RULES OF REVENGE

VIKING JUSTICE

Though they have a reputation for being bloodthirsty pirates abroad, the Vikings were governed by the rule of law at home

By David J Williamson, Jack Parsons and James Hoare

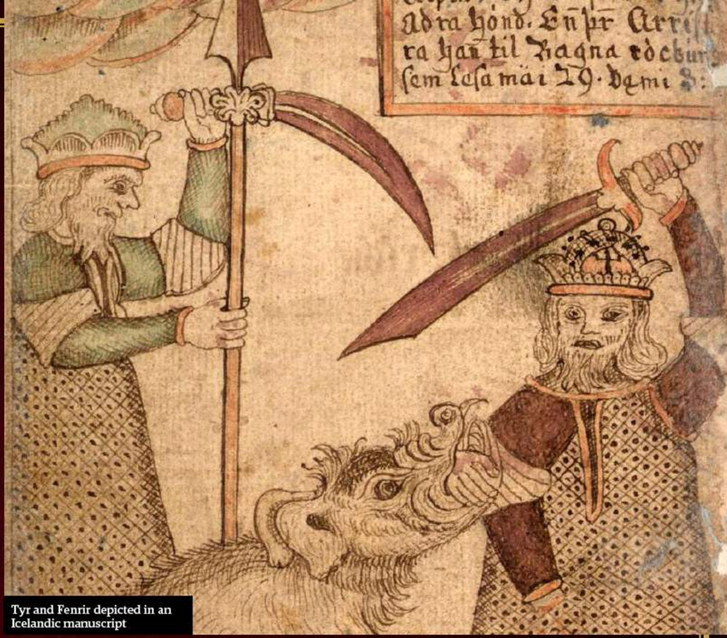
One vivid image of Viking raiders has endured over the centuries: rampant, bloodthirsty warriors emerging from their terrifying longships to ravage villages and towns, terrorising, killing without mercy and ransacking holy places of their precious and treasured possessions. To their terrified victims they were unruly savages, seemingly governed only by their thirst for battle and desire for gold and land.

Yet behind the wild and uncontrollable image there lies a different story: men and women from an ordered society that had structure and a deeply rooted desire for fairness and justice. Punishments could be severely disproportionate to the crime – just calling someone a coward could see you have to fight them to the death – but the Viking legal system was based on a legislative assembly where all free men had a say and trials were carried out with a jury of your peers.

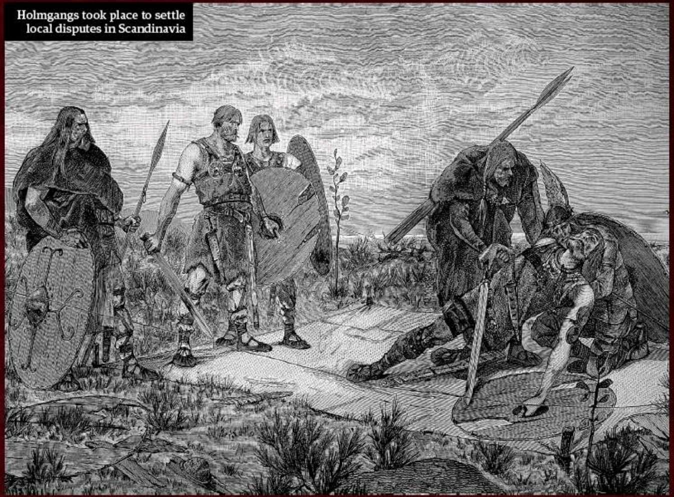
We use the term Vikings broadly, but its wrong to think of these people as a single group from a single place. In the Viking Age, as now, Scandinavia was a complex collection of countries, each with their own slightly different variation of a deeper shared culture and belief system, as well as their own ambitions and plans. Even these individual nations contained multitudes: beset by clan feuds, political factions in the warrior class and bitter disputes between individuals.

The need for laws and a system that was acceptable and workable for all was essential. In a society made up of farmers and warriors, often spread over vast distances, there was a dire need for something to draw these disparate people together, to maintain discipline among themselves and unity against others.

What evolved through the Viking Age was the Thing – a public gathering that would provide the opportunity for all people to express their views and settle disputes. New laws were made at the Allthing, an annual event where the opinions of the entire population could be heard on topics such as taxes, deciding and confirming who was king, and even peace treaties. The Allthing would also be a chance to trade between distant, scattered settlements and host religious festivals.



Tyr and Fenrir depicted in an Icelandic manuscript



Holmgangs took place to settle local disputes in Scandinavia

DIVINE JUDGEMENT

The saga of Tyr and Fenrir helped engrain a sense of justice into Norse culture

The importance of stories and sagas, especially about the exploits of the gods, was deeply ingrained into Viking society. The tales inspired and guided them as to how they should live their lives. The story of Tyr and Fenrir is a good example of the Viking sense of justice.

It was prophesised that the giant wolf Fenrir would devour the god Odin, so the gods set out to capture him. They instructed dwarves to create magical chains, each stronger than the last, to bind Fenrir, telling the wolf that they would test his strength. But upon seeing them, the cunning wolf became suspicious.

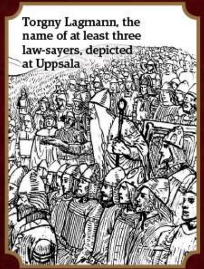
Then Fenrir, son of the trickster god Loki, had an idea. He said that he would only allow himself to be bound if one of the gods placed their hand in the wolf's mouth as an act of good faith. Tyr, the god of war, law and order, was the only one brave enough to volunteer. As expected, when Fenrir realised he could not escape the magical bonds, he promptly bit off Tyr's hand.

Tyr's actions were the embodiment of truth and justice to the Vikings. The gods had pledged an oath to the beast that had to be fulfilled and, as grisly as it may have been, Tyr saw his sacrifice as the only way in which justice could be served. In Viking society, the breaking of an oath was held in great contempt. The story of Tyr and Fenrir was the foundation of their unwavering belief in the strength of fairness and justice. Whether it was because of the legend or a reason the detail was added to the story, it was also forbidden to bind another person unless they had committed a crime.

While the most important disputes might be discussed at the Allthing, crimes were normally tried at the local and regional level at a Law-Thing, which were smaller but more met more frequently. These would cover topics such as property disputes and marital affairs, but perhaps also those that needed to be dealt with sooner, such as a murder investigation.

In most communities, a Thing would be presided over by a chieftain or even a king. However, this was not always the case. In Iceland there was no single figurehead at the centre of the rule of law and the people would elect a leader – admittedly, they still usually came from one of the wealthiest families on the island.

But it was the contribution made by the free men, known as karls, that made the Viking assemblies so much more democratic and set the standard for the system of law we recognise today. Viking society had a simple structure, with the majority of wealth and power in the hands of nobles, the jarls. Below them were the karls and then at the very bottom were the thralls, slaves who were usually foreigners captured on raids.


Torgny Lagmann, the name of at least three law-sayers, depicted at Uppsala

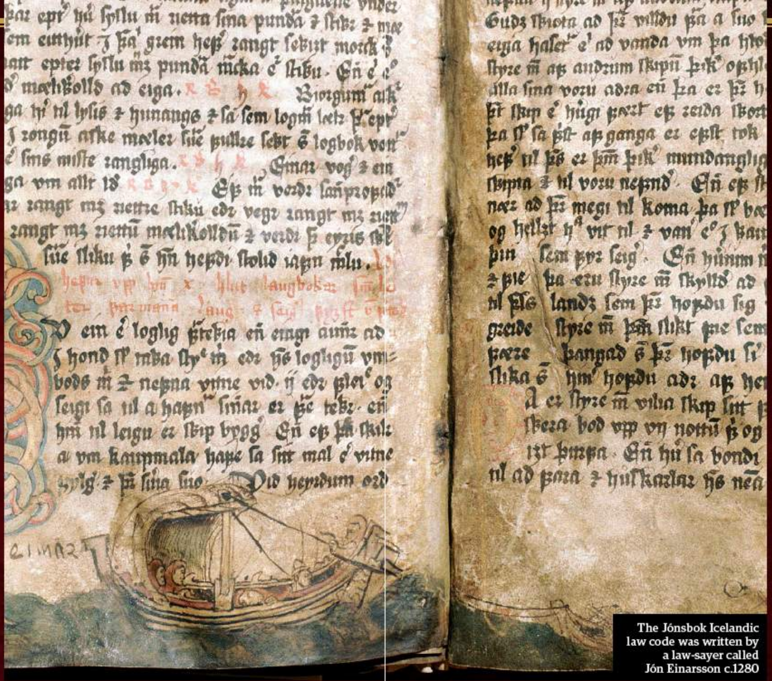
Each year at the Thing, the free men found their voice. We say men because, although attendance was every free man's duty, it was optional for women. While it is argued that this was for the practical reason that someone still needed to watch the homestead, it came with the assumption that men should handle public affairs and domestic life was better suited to women. Women were effectively relegated but this made the Vikings no worse than that other cradle of democracy, Ancient Greece.

Sitting on a panel – or a jury, as we would now call it – the mostly male karls would listen to both sides of any dispute, with testimony from the injured party, the accused and relevant witnesses. While the free men would often be swayed and influenced by the chieftain (who often had their own agenda), they would also be advised and guided by the law-sayer.

In a culture that had little to no writing other than runic symbols, the laws created, decisions made and sentences passed at each Thing would be committed to memory by this remarkable individual. The law-sayer would then guide the jury, reciting the relevant laws and pointing out legal precedents from previous disputes. However, they were not lawyers – the law-sayer was supposed to be objective and it was instead up to the relevant parties to prosecute and defend themselves. The law-sayer would be elected by the Allthing legislature and serve a three-year term.

Just as we swear oaths today, there are records of witnesses doing just that on a bloodied ring and so in the eyes of the community and the gods they were bound by honour. There is some speculation this was in some way connected to Ullr, the god of archery who skiied across the heavens and, like the god Tyr, represented fairness and justice. A shrine to Ullr has been uncovered along with 65 rings upon which it is thought vows were made before they were buried.

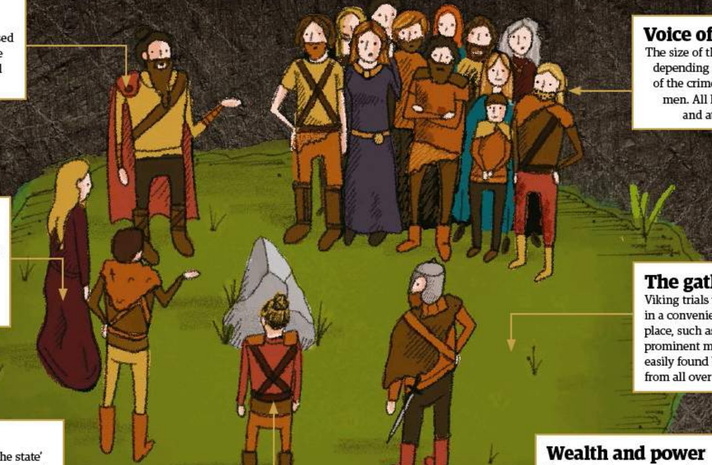
Oath-breaking was serious in the Viking Age and those accused of perjury were sentenced to a trial of ordeal. For example, one witness charged with lying had to build an archway. If they could pass beneath it without it collapsing, they were innocent because the gods had smiled on them.


The Jónsbok Icelandic law code was written by a law-sayer called Jón Einarsson c.1280

> "The law-sayer would be elected by the Allthing"

OPEN-AIR TRIAL

Viking disputes would be settled at assemblies known as Things



The memory man
With no written laws, past laws and decisions would be memorised by a law-sayer, who would advise the chieftain and the jury as well as be part of the final decision.

For and against
Witnesses would be able to speak on behalf of or against the accused but sometimes only got involved for personal gain or to settle an old score. They would swear on a bloodied ring.

In the dock
With no laws against 'the state' as such, most trials were brought by one individual against another or their family regarding property, honour, or the breaking of an arrangement or oath.

Voice of the people
The size of the jury would vary depending on the seriousness of the crime, with 12, 24 or 36 men. All had to be free men and at least 12 years old.

The gathering
Viking trials were often held in a convenient or well-known place, such as a field or a prominent mound that was easily found by those travelling from all over the region.

Wealth and power
The chief, who was often elected and from one of the community's wealthier families, would preside over the trial. Unfortunately, chiefs were not above being bribed or passing judgements in their own self-interest.

VICIOUS VIKING PUNISHMENTS

PAYING A FINE
Everything has a price

To the Vikings, everything and everyone had a price. When setting a fine for the guilty, a number of things would be taken into consideration such as the status of the individual and their ability to pay. They would also ensure that the amount was proportionate to the injustice done to the injured party. Quite often any fine would be split between the injured party, the local community and the chieftain or king, but was open to corruption.

TRIAL BY FIRE
Prove your innocence

In later years, after being converted to Christianity, Vikings could face trial by fire. This could take the form of walking across hot coals, carrying heated rocks or plunging hands into boiling water to pick out a hot iron. Should the wounds be clean and without infection after three days, it was taken as a sign that the gods had intervened and the accused was then immediately proven innocent.

MUTILATION
A warning to others

Viking slaves had no rights but Icelandic law did make provisions for how to punish offending thralls in the most harrowing way possible. The Grey Goose Laws stipulated that if a slave killed their master and tried to run away, they should have their arms and legs cut off but be allowed to live as long as they could as a warning to other slaves not to rebel.

SLAVERY
Paying with your life

While some thralls were foreigners captured in raids, others were Vikings who had committed a serious crime or had debts they could not pay. Slaves had no rights, had to obey their masters at all times and were often harshly treated. In fact, the punishment of being downgraded to a thrall also came with an implicit threat: it was not a crime for a Viking to kill their own slave.

BANISHMENT
Exiled into the wilderness

To be dishonest or dishonourable was a grave crime among the Vikings and it was punished severely. If the accused was sentenced to be put outside the law, or outlawed, it would be almost as serious as a death sentence. But there were two levels of outlaw – a semi-outlaw would be banished for a period of three years but still keep his property and possessions to return to, while a full outlaw would lose everything.

DEATH
Pay the ultimate price

Crimes like premeditated murder were almost always punished by death. While beheading was the most common form of execution, a particularly gruesome way to go was called the 'blood eagle'. The victim's ribs and lungs were pulled out of their back to create a pair of wings that 'fluttered' bird-like as they died. There are only two recorded victims of this death and they were both charged with killing Danish king Ivarr the Boneless' father.

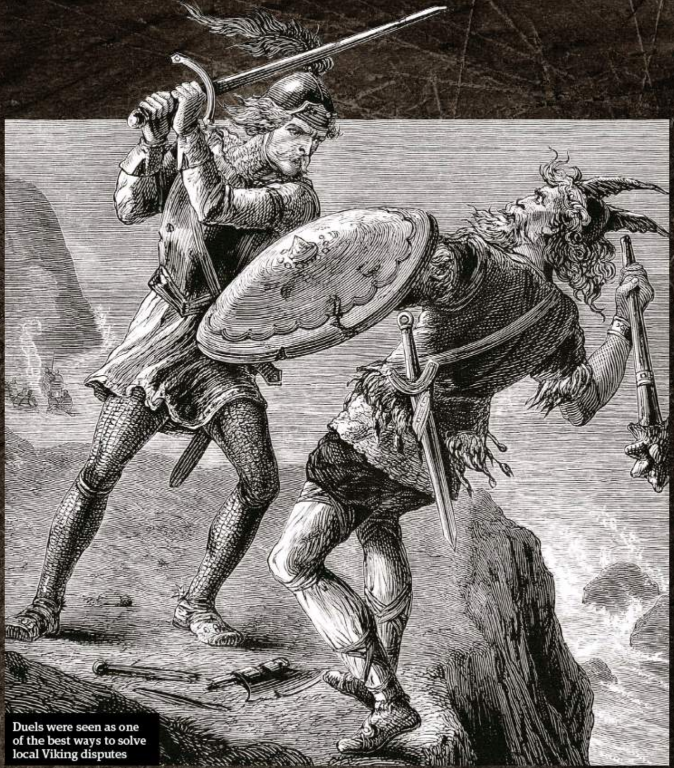
FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS

Holmgang – a ritual duel – was the most effective way of settling disputes in the Viking Age

For a society that had so much pride and honour at stake, Viking Age disputes could just as often be settled by a test of arms. Before the ritualised duelling of holmgang took off, Norsemen could settle their differences in a far less formal type of smackdown known as einvigi.

With no rules or set weapons, no moderators and no set arena, einvigi (meaning 'single combat') could be called to settle beef or establish fault in some dispute, and offered a release valve from the self-destructive patterns of feud, raid and retaliation that could destroy whole communities. If someone was killed in a duel, their family would be paid weregeld ('man price') in compensation and the matter was considered settled.

In an attempt to curb this bloodshed, the holmgang (meaning 'island-going') was introduced and with it strict rules that were set by the Thing. Of course the Norse world was a large one with communities settled in lands stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Irish Sea and the biting North Atlantic Ocean, so the finer details inevitably differed from location to location.


Duels were seen as one of the best ways to solve local Viking disputes

1. THE CHALLENGE IS ISSUED

The terms would be set down as part of the challenge, with the fighters agreeing on how much the loser would pay. Most communities had a space set aside for ritual combat, often a sacred grove or holy site, or a literal island or islet (hence the name). The fight would take place three to seven days after the challenge and to signal the start of combat, the challenger would recite the agreed terms. To refuse to accept would be seen as an unthinkable lack of honour.

2. THE STAGE IS SET

The arena was marked out by staking down cloaks or ox hide covering approximately six square metres in surface area – a symbolic island that replaced the earlier literal ones later on in the Viking Age. Treading outside of the arena was an automatic defeat – and a cowardly one, at that – and the spectators would jeer any step backwards towards the area's edge. The four corners of the square were marked with hazel staves and it is possible that the driving in of the stakes formed part of a religious ritual.

3. THE FIGHTERS TOOL UP

Both combatants were issued with a single light sword and a shield. In some cases, a second sword could be looped around the fighter's wrist on a thong. Religious rites that were designed to prevent evil magic from blunting the fighters' blades – a sure sign you're dealing with a berserker – added a certain level of spiritual protection along with the more conventional tools. Some sagas also offer alternative weapons, suggesting that the rules varied.

4. THE FIGHT BEGINS

In Icelandic law, the fighters would take it in turns to strike at each other, with the challenged party going first and the challenger attempting to parry with his sword or shield, before taking his turn. In Norway, the fighters simply had at it, hacking at each other with abandon.

5. CALL FOR BACK-UP

Each fighter was accompanied by a Shieldbearer, who carried two spare shields for resupply when their partner's flimsy offering shattered. He could even directly intervene with a shield to protect his fighter – and, with a bit of quick thinking, seriously affect the outcome by twisting and breaking a sword stuck in the wood. For this reason, fighters often prioritised smashing their opponent's shields and forcing the Shieldbearer out of play.

6. BLOOD IS DRAWN

Combat may have been close and originally holmgang duels *were* fights to the death, but because of the proximity it was actually quite difficult to deliver a killing blow – just as well, as death in Holmgang could lead to a feud that was exactly the sort of self-perpetuating carnage the ritual was designed to avoid. Instead, the fighters duke it out until the first splash of blood hit cloak.

7. BLOOD IS SHED

After the warriors have settled their accounts, a bull would be slaughtered to appease the god Odin in his role as the deity of death – a reminder that when a Norseman enters battle, he does so to take a life. Both challengers might have a bull waiting in the wings, or perhaps a third party would provide one to whoever emerged victorious from the fight.

However, these ordeals could be much tougher with trials like walking across hot coals, carrying heated rocks or plunging hands into boiling water to pick out a hot iron. If there burns didn't become infected within three days, they were innocent.

Besides perjury, the Thing had to contend with jury tampering. Powerful clans might bribe or threaten violence against free men to sway their votes. Sometimes it was even more insidious: free men might be more favourable to clans they owed some allegiance to or they could be prejudiced against sworn enemies.

Not unlike modern trial, the dispute was concluded when the jury unanimously voted on the best way to resolve it. The chieftain would then consider this when making a judgement. However, a crucial difference is that even though the Thing would decide upon a dispute and pass a sentence, it was not the assembly's responsibility to carry it out – this was down to the family of the injured party and it could take several different forms. On one level there was civilised discussion and an agreement made between the two parties, sometimes using an accepted third person as an arbitrator and often ending in a fine. But the nature of the crime sometimes called for much more drastic and severe punishments.

The ultimate price to pay for a Viking was to be outlawed from society. Those partially outlawed for three years had their home and possessions to return to, but to be fully outlawed, cast out, dishonoured and lose all worldly wealth was difficult to endure.

Added to this, tracking down and killing an outlaw wasn't a crime and so many would flee to other lands to escape such a fate. It was better than falling prey to ambitious individuals who sought to improve their status and standing in the community by carrying out their own death sentences in this way.

The 1,000th anniversary of the Allthing celebrated in Iceland, June 1930

> "THE ULTIMATE PRICE TO PAY FOR A VIKING WAS TO BE OUTLAWED FROM SOCIETY"

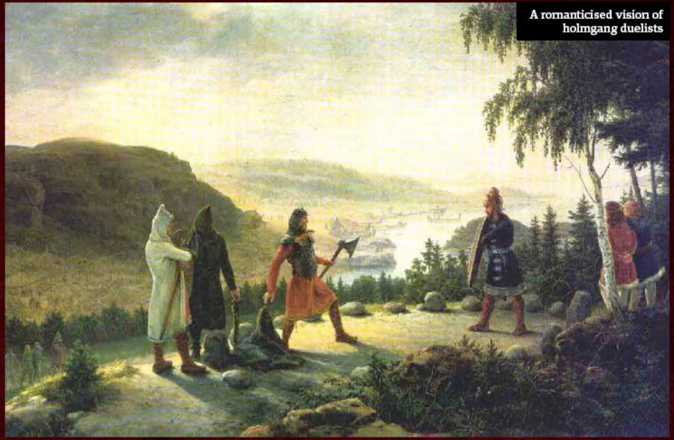
Another way of distributing justice was in hand-to-hand combat – a holmgang, or duel – but there was no guarantee of justice being on the side of the right. In simple Viking terms, the gods favoured the righteous and so the outcome was seen as justice being carried out. In reality, the result rested purely on the skills of those taking part and it could be a very uneven match. But it was possible for one of the parties to appoint a substitute or champion in their place and thereby possibly swing the fight in their favour. Either way, in the eyes of the gods it was always the winner who was in the right and the means justified the end.

However, Viking notions of which crimes deserved a fine and those that required capital punishments were very different from ours today. Taking responsibility for one's own actions was considered paramount. If you did something wrong, you had to admit to it and then you could defend yourself at the Thing, which was the honourable way to handle it.

You could even get away with murder – if you did it in broad daylight and not flee the scene, you would get a lighter sentence. Erik the Red killed two men in around 982 in Drangar, Iceland. He did not run and was exiled for three years. This worked out in his favour as he discovered Greenland while he was gone.

In contrast, theft was a heinous crime because stealing involves hiding one's action. Grettir the Strong was almost hung for stealing two sheep when he was a starving outlaw in the 11th century. This form of execution was very rare and considered particularly shameful. Slander could also carry a death sentence. Viking law dictated that to use insults that suggested another was unmanly or effeminate – for example, calling someone cowardly – gave a warrior the legal right to challenge their accuser to a duel.

Viking law clearly did not see piracy against foreigners as crime, but then again neither did Elizabethan England hundreds of years later. Nonetheless, Viking raiding eventually gave way to settlements across early Medieval Europe.

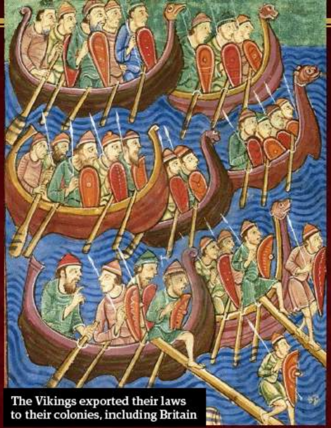

A romanticised vision of holmgang duelists

The Norwegians settled in Scotland, Ireland and Iceland; the Swedes in Russia, the Baltic, and Eastern Europe; the Danes in England and France.

With the flourishing of Viking settlements came the spread of their laws. Archaeological evidence for Things have been found in the Isle of Man, the Faroe Islands, Scotland and beyond. In many of these places, honorary Things still assemble.

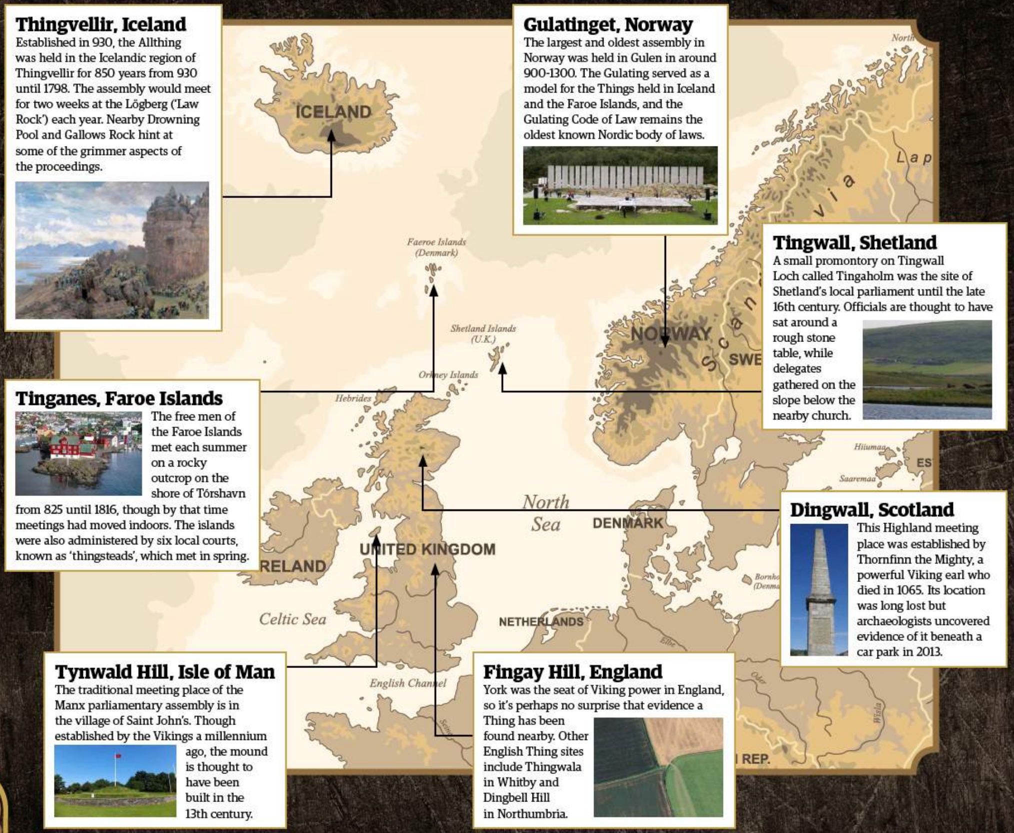
In England, meanwhile, the Danelaw represented a geographical area negotiated through various battles and treaties but it was the foundation of many aspects of modern law that we know today. Far from being oppressed and enslaved, the parts of England under Viking rule continued to thrive and there's no evidence that the Danelaw was any more lawless than neighbouring Wessex. In fact, Viking justice has left a legacy that endures to this day – the English word 'law' derives directly from Old Norse.

As a system of law and order, the Thing had its faults, such as being open to corruption and overly reliant on an unswerving belief in the will of the gods. But it was inclusive, giving the ordinary man a voice and placing the strong Viking values of honour and fairness at its core. It was this strength that was to carry it through many years of change, ensuring that smash-and-grab raiders could spread their influence throughout entire countries and on through the centuries to the enduring legacy that we have today.


The Vikings exported their laws to their colonies, including Britain

THE LAW OF THE LAND

Where Vikings went, Things followed



Thingvellir, Iceland

Established in 930, the Allthing was held in the Icelandic region of Thingvellir for 850 years from 930 until 1798. The assembly would meet for two weeks at the Lögberg ('Law Rock') each year. Nearby Drowning Pool and Gallows Rock hint at some of the grimmer aspects of the proceedings.

Gulatinget, Norway

The largest and oldest assembly in Norway was held in Gulen in around 900-1300. The Gulating served as a model for the Things held in Iceland and the Faroe Islands, and the Gulating Code of Law remains the oldest known Nordic body of laws.

Tingwall, Shetland

A small promontory on Tingwall Loch called Tingaholm was the site of Shetland's local parliament until the late 16th century. Officials are thought to have sat around a rough stone table, while delegates gathered on the slope below the nearby church.

Tinganes, Faroe Islands

The free men of the Faroe Islands met each summer on a rocky outcrop on the shore of Tórshavn from 825 until 1816, though by that time meetings had moved indoors. The islands were also administered by six local courts, known as 'thingsteads', which met in spring.

Dingwall, Scotland

This Highland meeting place was established by Thornfinn the Mighty, a powerful Viking earl who died in 1065. Its location was long lost but archaeologists uncovered evidence of it beneath a car park in 2013.

Tynwald Hill, Isle of Man

The traditional meeting place of the Manx parliamentary assembly is in the village of Saint John's. Though established by the Vikings a millennium ago, the mound is thought to have been built in the 13th century.

Fingay Hill, England

York was the seat of Viking power in England, so it's perhaps no surprise that evidence a Thing has been found nearby. Other English Thing sites include Thingwala in Whitby and Dingbell Hill in Northumbria.

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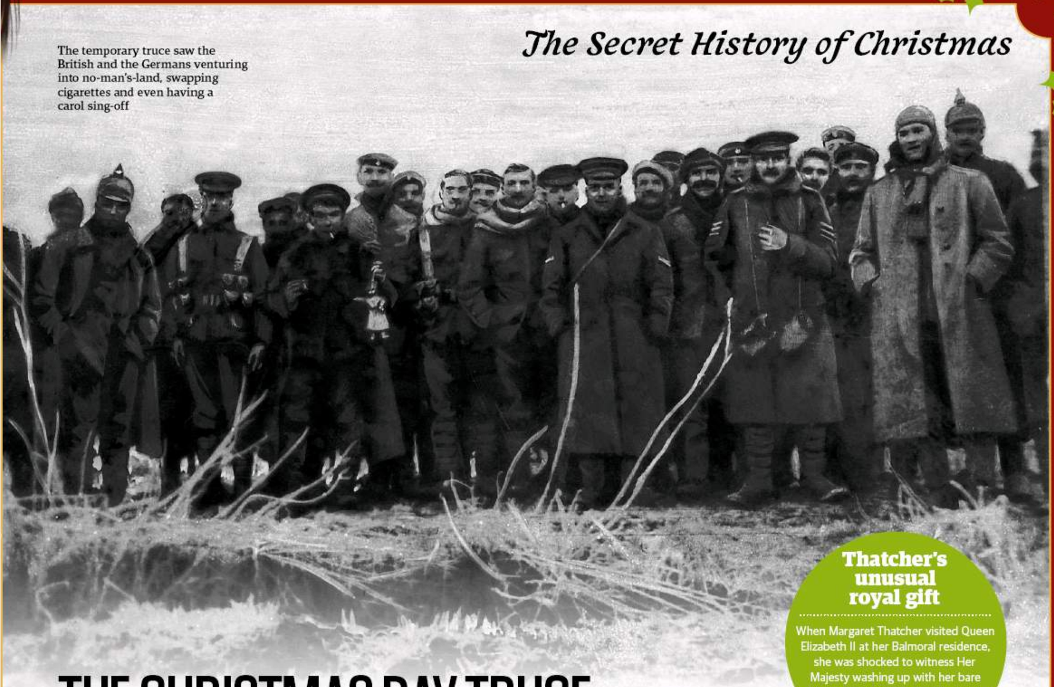
THE SECRET HISTORY OF *Christmas*

50 things you didn't know about the festive season

Written by Jessica Leggett



The temporary truce saw the British and the Germans venturing into no-man's-land, swapping cigarettes and even having a carol sing-off

THE CHRISTMAS DAY TRUCE

A temporary festive reprieve on the front line

On Christmas Eve 1914, British troops were holed up their trenches when they overheard the Germans singing 'Silent Night' and other carols. They responded with their own festive songs, sparking a sing-off between the two sides. The next day, 25 December, some of the soldiers made their way into no-man's-land to exchange gifts and take photos with the enemy. Whether the famous football match between the Germans and the British took place has been debated but there were certainly 'kick-abouts' between the two sides. It was a brief period of peace for those far away from home at a time when family was supposed to come together.

Although a heartwarming story, the same could not be said for the entire Western Front. Battles were still fought on Christmas Day and those who did manage to venture into no-man's-land safely were faced with the grim task of recovering the dead and retrieving the wounded. It was also not the only truce to have occurred along the Western Front in 1914.

Despite expectations that the war would be over by Christmas, it was soon clear that this was not to be. The initial enthusiasm of the troops had worn off as they became exhausted with the toil of war. By November 1914, there were small, informal truces along the Front in which soldiers from both sides agreed to quiet periods with no gunfire and a chance to recover the bodies of those who had fallen.

When reports reached the high command of the British Army of these little 'truces', they were angry. The troops were fraternising with the enemy and putting the task at hand in jeopardy. In 1915, an order was issued that anyone found initiating any such truces would be punished and they never happened again.

Thatcher's unusual royal gift

When Margaret Thatcher visited Queen Elizabeth II at her Balmoral residence, she was shocked to witness Her Majesty washing up with her bare hands. To solve this, Thatcher sent the Queen a pair of rubber gloves as a Christmas present.

> *"It was a brief period of peace for those far away from home"*

BRITAIN'S CHRISTMAS METEORITE

Britain's largest ever meteorite landed in Barwell, near Leicester, on Christmas Eve 1965. Described as being "the size of desk" when it first entered the atmosphere, by the time it reached the earth it had broken down into the size of a Christmas turkey! Luckily, no one was hurt by the incident.

THANKSGIVING CAROL

'Jingle Bells', one of the world's best-loved Christmas carols, was actually written for Thanksgiving. Originally titled 'One-Horse Open Sleigh', it was created in the mid-19th century by James Pierpoint for his father's Sunday school. The song proved so popular that the children asked to sing it again at Christmas and it has been deemed a festive song ever since.

SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT

According to legend, the carol 'Silent Night' was created as a result of mice chewing through a church organ. Joseph Mohr, a Catholic curate, found himself stuck on Christmas Eve 1818 after realising his organ could not be repaired. He wrote 'Silent Night' for the Midnight Mass service and the music was composed by Franz Xaver Gruber. The carol was soon copied and spread throughout Austria.

A PURITAN CHRISTMAS

The Puritan Pilgrims who settled in America during the 17th century were against the drunken celebration of Christmas, which they nicknamed 'Foolstide'. They did not believe that 25 December was the day of Christ's birth and Christmas was outlawed in 1659. Christmas Day would not be declared a federal holiday until 1870.

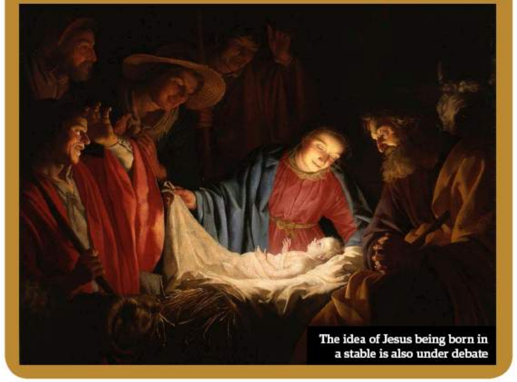
TRAFALGAR SQUARE TREE

Every single year you will find a magnificently decorated Christmas tree standing tall in the centre of London's Trafalgar Square in London – but do you know where it comes from? The tree has been a gift from the people of Oslo, Norway, since 1947 to thank the British for their help during World War II.

JESUS' REAL BIRTHDAY

When did Christ actually come among us?

The Bible never actually tells us when Jesus was born, with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke providing different accounts of the event. In fact it was Pope Julius I who declared Jesus' birthday to be 25 December in 345 CE, most likely to integrate the pagan celebrations with Christianity.



The idea of Jesus being born in a stable is also under debate

HOW GOOD WAS KING WENCESLAS REALLY?

The inspiration behind a well-loved Christmas carol

You may have heard of the carol 'Good King Wenceslas', but did you know that it is based on a real-life saint? Saint Wenceslaus was the duke of Bohemia from 921 until his assassination in 935, most likely at the hands of his own brother.

Wenceslaus' brutal death saw him remembered as a Catholic martyr and his popularity soared. Although he was only a duke, Holy Roman Emperor Otto I posthumously bestowed "the regnal dignity and title" on him, which is why he is known as a king in the carol.

THE DARK SIDE OF CHRISTMAS

Meet Krampus and his evil associates

Half devil, half goat, Krampus is Santa Claus' evil counterpart as depicted in Germanic folklore. While it was Santa's job to travel around and deliver gifts to the children who had been good, it was left to Krampus to punish those who had been naughty. He is known to carry around a large sack to kidnap the naughty children to eat, drown or drag down the underworld and he would use sticks to beat them.

Krampusnacht, also known as Krampus Night, is a celebration held on 5 December, the day before Saint Nicholas' Day, because this is when Krampus would supposedly arrive to dole out his various punishments. Today, the event is known for the raucous and drunk celebrations where people dress up as Krampus and run through the streets – however, this behaviour has not always been accepted. For years, the myth of Krampus became lost across Europe as the Catholic Church, which disapproved of the rowdiness, effectively sanitised Christmas.

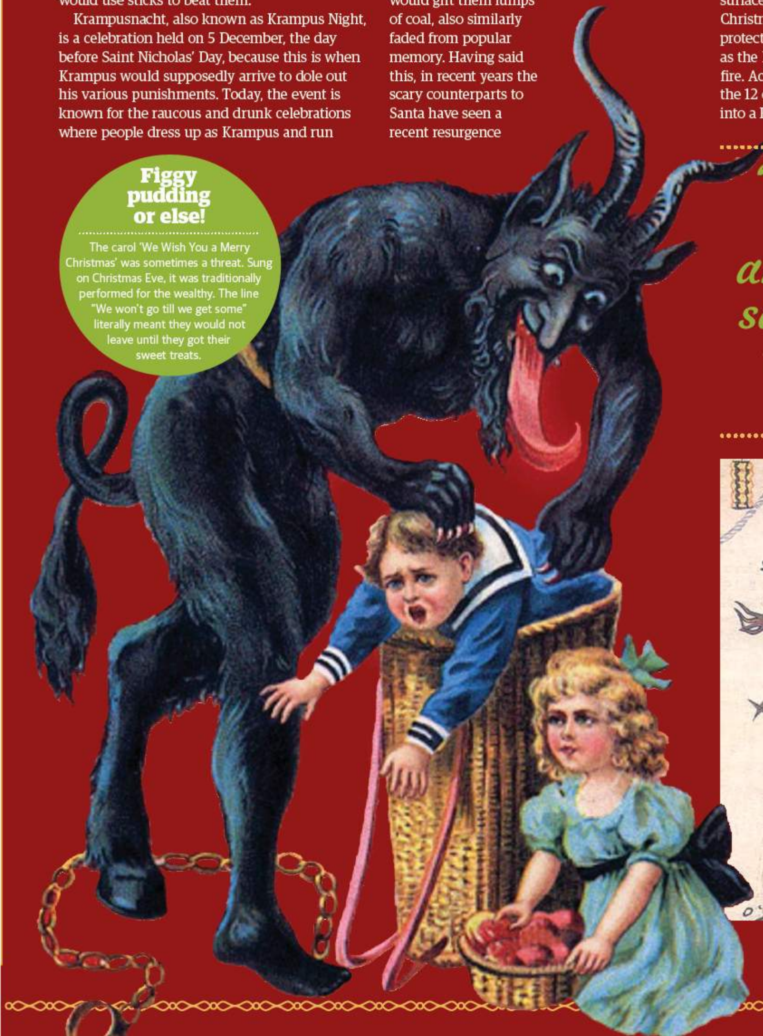
The tales of Santa's other evil companions, such as Le Père Fouettard, who whipped naughty children, and Knecht Ruprecht, who would gift them lumps of coal, also similarly faded from popular memory. Having said this, in recent years the scary counterparts to Santa have seen a recent resurgence in popularity, with their tales becoming increasingly commercialised.

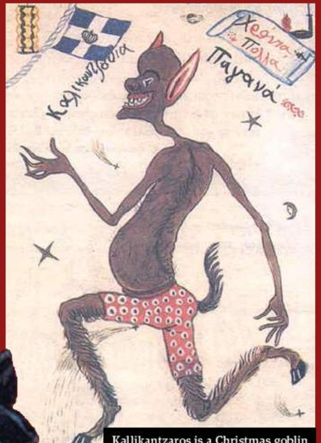
There are also characters out there that were known terrorise at Christmas but who were not necessarily associated with Santa Claus. The best example is the Kallikantzaros, goblins from southeastern European folklore that resemble little black devils. It was said that they would surface from underground during the 12 days of Christmas to trouble the humans on earth. To protect themselves, people would burn Yule logs as the Kallikantzaros could not walk through fire. According to legend, any child born during the 12 days of Christmas was at risk of turning into a Kallikantzaros.

> "He is known to carry around a large sack to kidnap the naughty children"

Figgy pudding or else!

The carol 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' was sometimes a threat. Sung on Christmas Eve, it was traditionally performed for the wealthy. The line "We won't go till we get some" literally meant they would not leave until they got their sweet treats.





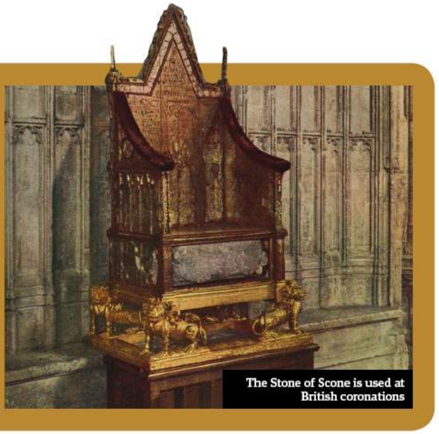
Kallikantzaros is a Christmas goblin in Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia

THE STONE OF SCONE

The controversy behind the historic symbol

The ancient Stone of Scone had been used for centuries for the coronation of the monarchs of Scotland before it was brought to England by Edward I in 1296. Subsequently used for the coronations of English and later British monarchs, it was last used for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

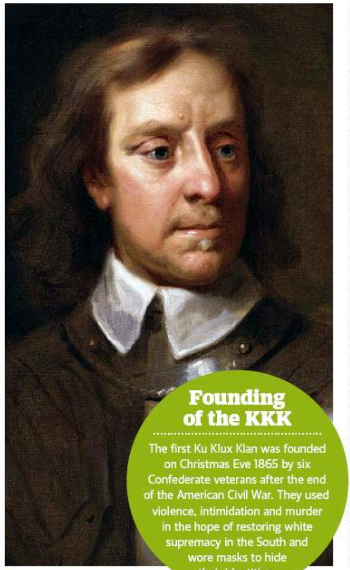
On Christmas Day 1950, the Stone was removed from its place at Westminster Abbey and returned to Scotland by four Scottish students and nationalists. It was finally brought back to England in 1952 but this was rumoured to be a fake, with the original still in Scotland. In 1996, the decision was made by the British Government to move the Stone to Scotland until the next coronation. It was taken to Edinburgh Castle with its return marking 700 years since it had been removed by the English.



The Stone of Scone is used at British coronations

LAWBREAKING MINCE PIES

As we know, Oliver Cromwell and Parliament banished Christmas celebrations and made mince pies and other Christmas foods illegal, hoping that it would drive out the gluttony in the country. However, when Charles II became king in 1660, the ban was lifted and the law no longer exists.



Founding of the KKK

The first Ku Klux Klan was founded on Christmas Eve 1865 by six Confederate veterans after the end of the American Civil War. They used violence, intimidation and murder in the hope of restoring white supremacy in the South and wore masks to hide their identities.

KISS ME UNDER THE MISTLETOE

The history of the festive plant

The Celtic Druids believed that mistletoe was a symbol of fertility because it could survive the harsh winters and still bear berries. It was used in elixirs designed to cure infertility and sprigs of it would also be hung over doorways as protection against evil spirits.

In Norse mythology, the tale of Baldr – the son of Odin and Frigg – is associated with mistletoe. There was a prophecy that Baldr would die and so Frigg, the goddess of love, made every creature and plant on Earth promise to never hurt him. However, she failed to ask the harmless mistletoe and so Loki made an arrow out of the plant, which he used to kill Baldr. Frigg was devastated and it was said that her tears formed the mistletoe's white berries. In one version of the tale, Baldr was restored to life and Frigg blessed the plant as a symbol of love, swearing to kiss anyone who walked under it.

At some point in the 18th century, mistletoe became ingrained in Christmas tradition, although it is unknown how and why it became a fixture of festive celebrations in the first place.

Mistletoe is seen as a romantic plant at Christmas

A TIME FOR CORONATIONS

A number of Medieval monarchs consciously chose to be crowned on Christmas Day. It meant that their coronation would tie in with the celebrations for the birth of Christ, which would in emphasise their divine right to rule as awarded to them by God.

Charlemagne, Holy Roman emperor, 800

Mieszko II Lambert, king of Poland, 1025

William the Conqueror, king of England, 1066

Bolesław II, king of Poland, 1076

Baldwin I, king of Jerusalem, 1100

Roger II, king of Sicily, 1130

THREE LEADERS WHO LOST THEIR CROWNS AT CHRISTMAS

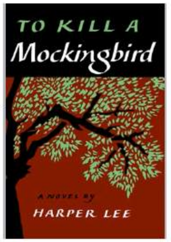
Leo V, emperor of the Byzantine Empire, Assassinated, 820

Vetranio, co-emperor of the Roman Empire, Forced to abdicate, 350

Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the Soviet Union Resigned, 1991

A LIFE-CHANGING GIFT

Author Harper Lee worked for years to support herself while struggling to find the time to write. Everything changed in 1956 when her friends Michael and Joy Brown gifted her a year's worth of wages for Christmas. Lee quit her job and wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one of the world's best-selling novels.



THE ROOTS OF DECKING THE HALLS

Evergreens have been a popular choice for winter decorations since pagan times with the belief that they represented everlasting life. Herbs such as rosemary and bay, which symbolise remembrance and valour respectively, were commonplace in the home. Holly, a masculine plant, and ivy, a feminine plant, were thought to balance the home.

The two plants have also inspired the carol 'The Holly and the Ivy'

THE GRAVE OF SAINT NICHOLAS

Where was the real-life Santa Claus really buried?

Recently, archaeologists in Turkey have discovered what they believe to be the tomb of Saint Nicholas – in other words, the resting place of Father Christmas. Saint Nicholas was believed to have been born in Myra, modern-day Demre, in southern Turkey, where this tomb has been found under an ancient church. Known for his kindness, generosity and secretly giving gifts to the children of Myra, he lived during the 4th century. However, he didn't become known as 'Santa Claus' until the 16th when he became popular across Europe.

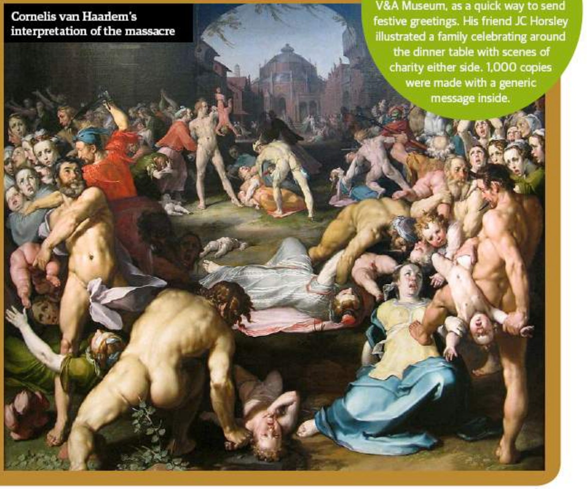
THE REAL KING HEROD

Did the Massacre of the Innocents really happen?

The legacy of King Herod, the Roman-appointed ruler of Judaea, is a controversial one. Although he was responsible for a large number of astonishing building projects that got underway during his reign, such as fortresses and theatres, he is also thought of for his tyranny.

The event that Herod is most remembered for is the Massacre of the Innocents, which is depicted in the Gospel of Matthew. He ordered that all male infants who were aged two or under in Bethlehem must be killed to avoid losing his throne the newborn baby Jesus, King of the Jews. The massacre inspired the 'Coventry Carol', a 16th-century Christmas tune that was a lullaby sung by the mothers of the infants destined to be killed.

However, as the massacre is only mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, it has been disputed as a myth rather than an actual historical event. There is a day dedicated to those who supposedly died, known as Holy Innocents' Day, to commemorate the infant martyrs, which is usually held between 27 December and 10 January, depending on the Church. Whether the massacre occurred or not, there is no denying that Herod became extremely paranoid during his reign and he did commit a number of brutal acts, including the murder of his wife and two sons. Knowing that Herod used such violence, it is not impossible to believe that he could have been capable to order the massacre.


Cornelis van Haarlem's interpretation of the massacre

Holiday greetings

The Christmas card was the idea of Sir Henry Cole, the founder of the V&A Museum, as a quick way to send festive greetings. His friend JC Horsley illustrated a family celebrating around the dinner table with scenes of charity either side. 1,000 copies were made with a generic message inside.

HISTORY OF ADVENT

It is unclear when the season of Advent was first introduced, although we know that monks were expected to fast every day in December until Christmas by the 5th century. This period of fasting represented the anticipation for the Nativity and the birth of Christ but the practice had died down considerably by the 13th century.

THE CONFEDERACY'S CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

Andrew Johnson, 17th president of the United States, continued Abraham Lincoln's plan to pardon Confederate soldiers following the end of the American Civil War. After the initial pardons were issued, Johnson gave a full pardon and amnesty to all ex-Confederate soldiers on Christmas Day 1868.

A ROYAL MISCONCEPTION

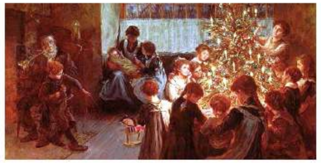
Who really introduced Christmas trees to England?

Ask anyone who introduced the Christmas tree to England and most will say Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort. However, this is one of the most common misconceptions associated with festive season. In fact, it was actually Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III, who brought the first known Christmas tree to England a good four decades before Albert.

Christmas trees were a part of Charlotte's life from her native Mecklenburg-Strelitz. She brought many of her German traditions with her when she married George in 1761, turning Christmas into a far more public affair than it had been. Her first Christmas tree, installed in 1800 at Queen's Lodge, Windsor, was nothing short of magical to all those that beheld it. Decorated with tinsel, sweets and candles, it sparked a new trend among the English nobility. Even Queen Victoria was said to have enjoyed Christmas trees during her childhood, which quite clearly points to the fact her husband was not responsible for bringing them to England.

So why does the story go that it was Prince Albert who introduced the tree in December 1840? Well, at this point Christmas trees were only common among the upper classes. When the periodicals such as the *Illustrated London News* began to print pictures of Victoria, Albert and the royal family gathered around their Christmas tree, the trend soon spread like wildfire across the country.

Albert certainly encouraged the development of Christmas trees as a popular tradition in England, which is why he has become so synonymous with them. As it turns out, though, it was still a German who brought Christmas trees to England – we have the Georgians to thank for the introduction and the Victorians for its popularity.



A DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS

How Charles Dickens has shaped the holiday we all know and love

When it comes to the holiday season, Charles Dickens and Christmas go hand in hand. He is often credited with inventing Christmas as we know it and while it is an exaggeration, his vision of the perfect festive holiday has continued to persevere to this day.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Christmas was rarely celebrated with many treating it like the average workday. As new traditions began to emerge such as Christmas cards and crackers, the festive season soon developed into one of the biggest holidays of the year.

It was also during the Victorian era that Christmas really started to become about families spending time together. Images of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their many children enjoying the holiday together, whether it was by the tree or eating their large, decadent dinner, helped to influence others to do the same.

So what about Dickens? Well, thanks to his Christmas novels, in particular *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843, he helped to spread the festive traditions that are so dear today. Through his novels he encouraged the message that Christmas was a time for love, family and goodwill, which struck a chord with moral Victorian society. The story also served as a way for Dickens to promote the need for charity with the use of poor Tiny Tim, having experienced poverty as a child himself.

As the popularity of his novels spread throughout the country, Dickens helped to revive the idea of the perfect family Christmas. His novel was so well loved that the author began to do public readings in 1849 and they continued right up until his death in 1870.

Charles Dickens is perhaps best known for his festive fiction

WHITE WINTER DREAMS

It is thanks to Dickens that we all wish for snow at Christmas. He grew up during the Little Ice Age and so the winters of his childhood were exceptionally cold and, well, white! He incorporated his ideas about Christmas into his novels and the idea of a white winter wonderland have continued to stick to this day, perpetuated by art and films.

EATING THE TURKEY

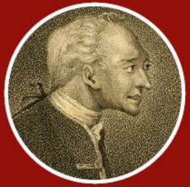
In almost every film or television adaption of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge wakes up on Christmas Day, turns up at the Cratchit house with a turkey and spends the day with them. But Scrooge never does this in the novel – he actually spends the day with his nephew, Fred, and his family, sending a turkey to the Cratchit house anonymously.

DICKENS' OTHER FESTIVE NOVELS

Although *A Christmas Carol* is one of Dickens' most famous novels, it was actually the first in a series of five books that he wrote for the festive season. The other four works were *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846) and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848).

TO COIN A PHRASE

Did you know that the terms 'Merry Christmas' and 'Bah! Humbug' were not widely used until Dickens wrote them in *A Christmas Carol*? Just like so many other festive traditions and phrases, Dickens' famous novel helped to popularise the sayings among the Victorians and we have been saying them ever since as a result.



THE REAL SCROOGE

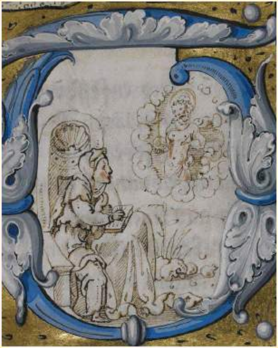
Dickens got the inspiration for the cold-hearted character of Ebenezer Scrooge from real-life people, most notably the 18th-century miser and politician John Elwes. Elwes was supposedly so stingy that he would only wear ragged clothes and would eat putrefied meat to save money. Funnily enough, he actually had a large fortune – just like Scrooge.

CHRISTMAS SECRETS

A gift often given to American soldiers during World War II was a pack of Bicycle playing cards by the company ISPCC. At first glance they were nothing more than simple cards, but if they got wet, each card would reveal part of a secret map. Join them all together and the soldier could use them to escape a prisoner-of-war camp.

SAINTLY SIGHT

The visions of the mystic Saint Bridget of Sweden changed the way the Nativity has been depicted since late Medieval times. Shortly before she passed away, Saint Bridget described seeing the infant Jesus with blond hair, emitting light and lying on the ground. Alongside her other visions, many pieces of art portrayed Jesus to match what she had described.



DEFYING CROMWELL

Between 1644 and 1659, the celebration of Christmas was suppressed in England under Oliver Cromwell. When the English Parliament decided to ban Christmas altogether in 1647, there were outbreaks of rioting across the country and widespread disobedience of the law. Shops remained closed and many chose to passively resist the ban by continuing with their Christmas feasts and festivities.

A FEAST FOR THE AGES

How the Christmas dinner has evolved

MIDDLE AGES

A) Boar's head

A roasted boar's head was a common feature at Christmas banquets across Europe as it supposedly represented the triumph of Christ over sin – a reflection of Christianity taking over paganism.

B) Venison

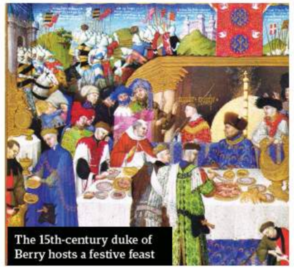
Alongside various other meats, venison was always served at Christmas. The haunch would have been eaten by the rich but the animal's offal would be given to the servants to make umble pie.

C) Bread, cheese and ale

An unlimited supply of bread and cheese was a popular choice to accompany the extravagant Christmas dishes at the banquets of the rich, washed down with a jug of ale.

D) Frumenty pudding

Made from boiled, cracked wheat, frumenty pudding was a popular dish during the Middle Ages, often served alongside meat such as venison. It was a mainstay of a Medieval Christmas dinner.



The 15th-century duke of Berry hosts a festive feast

GEORGIAN

I) Black butter

A classic Christmas preserve, black butter was a mild and sweet accompaniment to cheese and crackers. Its main ingredients included apples, cider and cinnamon, and it was usually prepared in November.

K) Mince pies

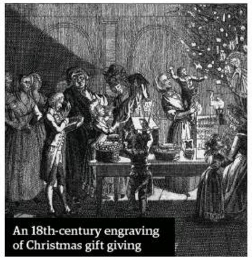
Although the mince pies we enjoy today are sweet, the Georgians made them with actual minced beef or lamb along with raisins and currants.

L) Apple dumplings and rice puddings

We know that the Georgians enjoyed a festive feast with apple dumplings and rice puddings thanks to a letter from the writer Jane Austen to her sister, Cassandra. After the last of her guests were gone, she wrote, "I shall be left to the comfortable disposal of my time, to ease of mind from the torments of rice puddings and apple dumplings."

J) Twelfth Night Cake

The centrepiece of a Georgian's Twelfth Night parties. The elaborate cake contained both a dried bean and a dried pea – whoever found the bean in their slice would become king for the night and the pea picked the queen.



An 18th-century engraving of Christmas gift giving

WORLD WAR II

Q) Roast rabbit

The government encouraged people to eat rabbits caught in the wild to ease the pressure on meat rations. Popular recipes included roast rabbit or rabbit stew.

S) 'Murkey'

For many, real turkey just wasn't an option during wartime rationing. Instead, many households had mock turkey, which was actually mutton stuffed with breadcrumbs. It was developed by Gert and Daisy, stars of BBC Radio's *The Kitchen Front*.

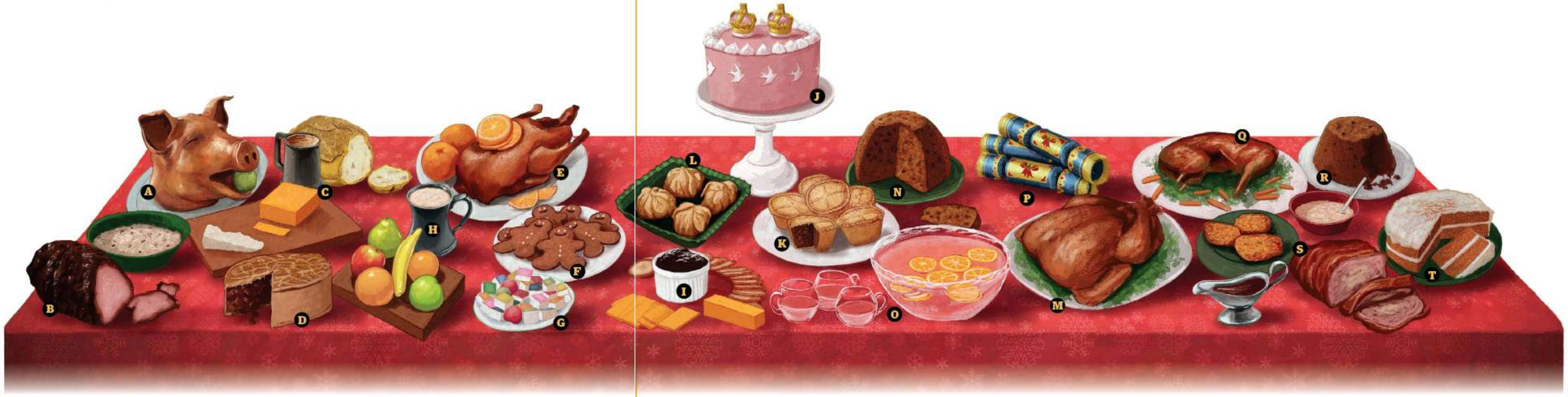
T) Carrot cake

Rationing during the war meant that ingredients such as eggs, sugar and butter were in very low supply. In order to sweeten cakes, grated carrots were used as a substitute for sugar.

R) Christmas pudding

Following the 'make do and mend' mentality of the war, the Christmas pudding was often made with more unusual ingredients in place of rations. The pudding generally had less fruit and no eggs and would sometimes contain root vegetables.

London air raid corps workers tuck into a pudding



ELIZABETHAN

E) Roast goose

In 1558, the English defeated the Spanish Armada. To celebrate, Elizabeth I ordered that the whole of England eat roast goose for Christmas dinner as it was the first meal she had eaten after the Spanish were beaten.

G) Sweetmeats

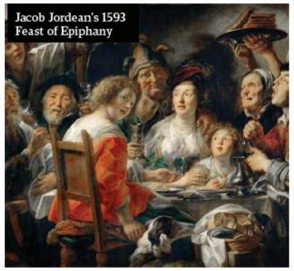
Sugar was an extremely expensive foodstuff in Elizabethan England. Rather than for taste, it was used to show off the wealth and status of the host and was a key ingredient in a number of dishes.

F) Gingerbread

Gingerbread was one of the many sweet foods that could be found at an Elizabethan Christmas. In fact, gingerbread men were first attributed to Elizabeth's court and she served them to foreign dignitaries.

H) Lambswool

Lambswool was a popular hot drink made from cider, sherry or ale, with spices and apples. The heat would cause the ingredients burst and form a woolly top, giving the drink its name.



Jacob Jordean's 1593 Feast of Epiphany

VICTORIANS

M) Turkey

Turkey was not the traditional meat for a Christmas dinner. Although not commonplace, Queen Victoria had one and it soon grew in popularity as a way to feed large middle-class families.

O) Gin punch

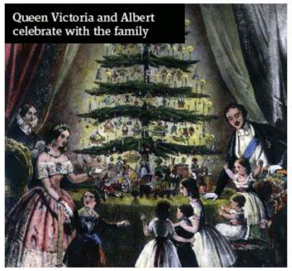
Gin punch was a simple drink of gin, hot water, lemon and spices but it always went down well with the dinner guests – and would often spark a few rowdy drinking games.

N) Plum pudding

A classic Victorian dish, plum pudding was often served alongside the savoury dishes of the evening rather than with the desserts. It was tradition to put a coin in the pudding mixture – a trend reportedly started by the queen as a thank you to the cook.

P) Christmas cracker

Tom Smith, a confectioner's apprentice, decided to sell sugared almond bon-bons after discovering them in Paris. They failed to catch on as he had hoped and after a few years he created the Christmas cracker as an ingenious new way to market his product.



Queen Victoria and Albert celebrate with the family

> "Elizabeth I ordered that the whole of England eat goose"

'Tis the season

The melody of the beloved carol 'Deck the Halls' dates back to the 18th century and is actually derived from 'Nos Galan', a traditional Welsh New Year's Eve song. Originally created for dancing rather than singing, the musician Thomas Oliphant wrote the lyrics in English and they were published in 1862.

THE COCA-COLA LIE

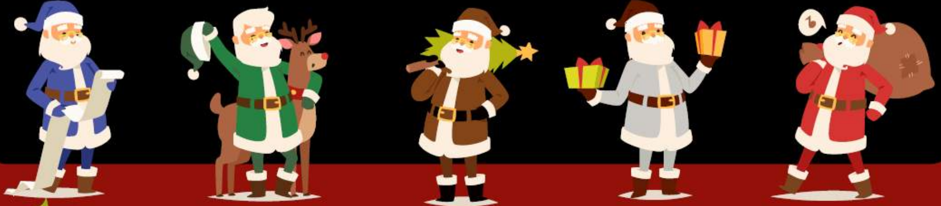
The real story behind Santa's suit

The classic story that Coca-Cola was responsible for Santa's red outfit is a complete myth. In actual fact, Santa has been depicted in red for centuries, with the popular red and white combination influenced by the real-life Saint Nicholas. Coca-Cola's Santa took inspiration from the cartoons of Thomas Nast and helped to bring the look to mainstream attention during the 1930s. However, Santa has also worn other colours.

During the 19th century in England, he was pictured in white, brown and green on Christmas cards and illustrations. The Ghost of Christmas Present, who resembles Santa, was illustrated in green for Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. In Russia, Stalin ordered that the Russian equivalent to Santa, Ded Moroz, should wear a blue coat so he could not be confused with the Western counterpart.

THE CHANGING COLOURS OF FATHER CHRISTMAS

Blue	Green	Brown	White	Red
Russia, 20th century	England, mid-19th century	England, 19th century	Luton, England, 19th century	Myra, modern-day Turkey, 4th century



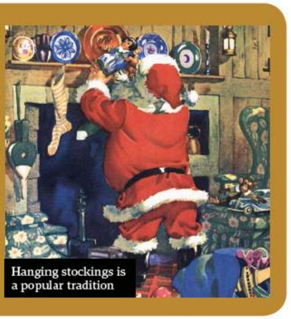
A TALE OF THREE STOCKINGS

Why do we hang stockings on the fireplace at Christmas?

As the story goes, there was a widowed man with three very beautiful daughters. The family was poor and the man was scared that his daughters would never marry because of their low status.

One day, Saint Nicholas was walking through the town when he overheard the local villagers discussing the sad situation of the three girls. He decided to help but knew that the man would never accept an act of charity so he secretly entered the family's home at night, by sliding down the chimney, and noticed that the girls had hung their newly washed stockings up to dry on the fireplace. He filled each one with enough gold for a dowry and disappeared into the night.

The next morning, the girls were elated to find the money and their father was finally at peace. When the townspeople heard what at happened, they too hung up stockings on their fireplaces.



Hanging stockings is a popular tradition

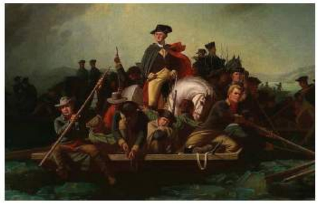
WASHINGTON'S DARING ATTACK

How Washington's festive mission changed the tide of war

Over a decade before he became president, George Washington was the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolution. After experiencing several defeats against the British, including the loss of New York City, he decided more drastic action was needed — a surprise attack.

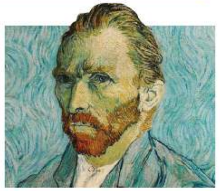
The British had left behind a garrison of Hessian troops in Trenton, New Jersey, who were getting into the festive spirit, unaware of the events about to unfold. During the night of 25 December 1776, Washington's forces crossed the icy Delaware River and caught the Hessian troops off-guard in the early hours of the 26th. They were easily defeated and the Americans seized 1,000 prisoners as well as supplies.

Remembered as the Battle of Trenton, the event served to rise the morale of the Continental Army and contributed to a surge in new recruits, which was desperately needed.



CHRISTMAS BREAKDOWN

On 23 December 1888, Vincent van Gogh famously cut off his left ear and handed it to a brothel maid. Why he took such a drastic step remains unclear but it has been suggested that the artist freaked out after receiving a letter informing him of his brother's impending marriage.



THE ORIGINS OF POINSETTIA

Poinsettia is a staple for the festive holidays, but did you know that it was originally associated with the Aztecs? They used it to produce red dye and fever medication. By the 17th century it had also become associated with Christmas, thanks to its resemblance to the Star of Bethlehem shining brightly in the sky.

FESTIVE CHEER

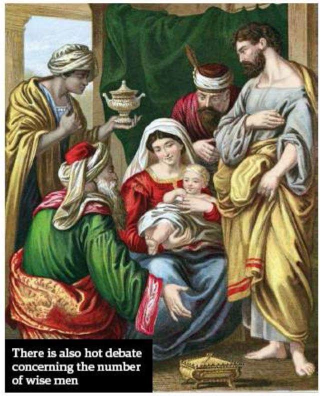
During the devastation of World War I, there was one thing that could lift the spirits of those so far from home. In the period leading up to Christmas in 1917, over 50,000 parcels a day were received across the Channel by soldiers from their loved ones.

WHY 'BOXING DAY'?

Traditionally, Boxing Day was associated with charity and churches' money boxes would be opened for the poor. As time moved on, the charitable association died out and Boxing Day became a day where the family would gather outside to exercise after the excess of Christmas.

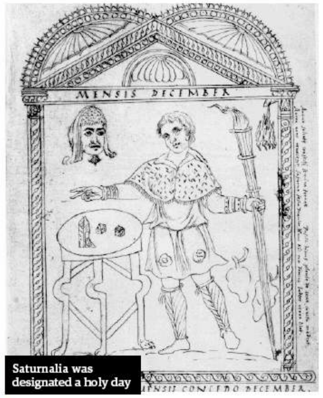
THE THREE WISE… WHO?

Despite what the Nativity tells us, the baby Jesus was not visited by three wise kings the night he was born. In fact, he was visited by three wise men bearing gifts – and they actually arrived a couple of months after his birth.


There is also hot debate concerning the number of wise men

IO SATURNALIA!

Although the Romans held celebrations in December, it was not for the Christmas that we know and love today. They celebrated Saturnalia, the pagan winter solstice festival, where gifts were exchanged and lavish banquets and entertainments were held. It was named in honour of Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture.



Saturnalia was designated a holy day

THE NAZI PLOT TO STEAL CHRISTMAS

Hitler hijacked the holiday, removing Christian references

In Nazi Germany, Christmas was celebrated by decorating trees with swastikas and children were given gifts such as toy tanks and SS soldier action figures. This much we might expect from the Nazi propaganda machine, but what might baffle some is that these boys and girls were given their gifts by the Nordic god Odin.

This was in part because Nazis ideologues saw organised religion as an enemy of the totalitarian state, so sought to de-emphasise – if not eliminate altogether – Christianity from the holiday. Christmas carols were rewritten to reflect the party's views; the most popular carol, 'Exalted Night of the Clear Stars', continued to be sung even after 1945. Families were encouraged to make homemade decorations in the shape of 'Odin's Sun Wheel' and bake treats in the shape of Nordic fertility symbols. Official celebrations might mention a supreme being but they more prominently featured 'light' rituals. To this end, lighting candles on your Christmas tree was encouraged over putting up a Star of Bethlehem.

Resurrecting the old Germanic gods was also supposed to be about celebrating the Aryan race's supposed heritage, normalising the Nazi ideologies of racial purity. Christmas cards invariably featured blonde-haired, blue-eyed German families gathered around Christmas trees. Germans were also encouraged to 'buy Aryan' and boycott Jewish department stores.

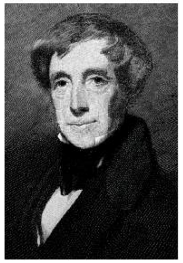
There were those who objected to Christ being taken out of Christmas – particularly members of the clergy. However, many seemed to embrace the neo-pagan festival's brightly coloured pageantry. The secret police reported that complaints about official policies dissolved in an overall "Christmas mood."

Waffen-SS cadets' Christmas Party, 1941

Nazi Youth members collected food for the poor at Christmas

O CHRISTMAS TREE…

A popular tale regarding the origins of the Christmas tree features one of the most controversial men in European history. Apparently Martin Luther, the German Protestant reformer, was the first to think of decorating a tree for Christmas. Supposedly, Luther was walking home one evening when he looked up at the night sky and was amazed by its beauty. Surrounded by evergreen trees, he became inspired and hoped to recreate the scene for his family. He brought a tree into the house and proceeded to decorate it with lit candles. While this may or may not be true, Christmas trees did originate in Germany…



CREATING SAINT NICK

A visit from St. Nicholas is a poem by Clement Clarke Moore that was composed in 1822. Thanks to Moore's poem, the image of Santa Claus as a fat, "jolly old elf" became popularised during the 19th century and is what we know today. One of Moore's inspirations was Saint Nicholas and he supposedly composed the poem while on a sleigh on a snowy day.

The poem redefined the traditions of Christmas gift giving as Father Christmas was depicted flying from house to house on 24 December, magically entering each one through the chimney. Until this point, Santa had always been portrayed as arriving on Christmas Day.

ODIN: THE ORIGINAL SANTA CLAUS?

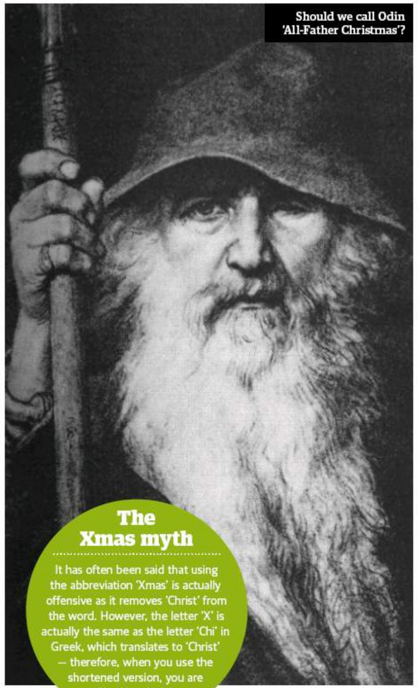
The pagan influence behind the jolly old man loved today

The Nazis appropriation of Odin for their Christmas celebrations has some basis in fact. Pre-Christian Germans celebrated Yule. During this time, Odin would go on his 'wild hunt' in the sky. Children would leave their boots filled with straw for his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, and when Odin flew past he would leave them gifts like toys and sweets in return – much like how children today put food out for Santa's reindeer when he visits their homes to leave them presents.

Gift giving is not the only way in which Odin and Santa Claus are similar characters. Odin is frequently portrayed with a long, white beard, just like Saint Nicholas, and he rode his horse across the sky much like how Father Christmas rides with his reindeer and sleigh.

Also, Odin had the uncanny ability to always know if someone had been good or bad. For those who were bad, he would hand out punishments and many feared that he was watching them at all times. This is a skill that Santa Claus also possesses, although it would seem that worst punishment from him would be a lump of coal.

Pagan traditions became assimilated into Christian ones as Christianity took hold across Europe. It is reasonable to suggest that Santa, a Christian figure, supplanted Odin's place as worship of pagan deities was eventually banned and, in doing so, he also took on a few of Odin's characteristics.


Should we call Odin 'All-Father Christmas'?

The Xmas myth

It has often been said that using the abbreviation 'Xmas' is actually offensive as it removes 'Christ' from the word. However, the letter 'X' is actually the same as the letter 'Chi' in Greek, which translates to 'Christ' – therefore, when you use the shortened version, you are still acknowledging Jesus.

A CONNING CHRISTMAS CROOK

John Duval Gluck founded the Santa Claus Association in 1913 to help the New York Post Office deal with the numerous letters addressed to Santa. The Association sorted through the letters, passing them on to donors who would buy the gifts for the children. The service was popular and soon enough, Gluck began to ask for funds for a new company building. When the building never materialised but Gluck continued to ask for money, suspicions were raised. In 1927, it was discovered that he could not account for large amounts of the money – there was not enough to convict him, but Gluck was stripped of his role.

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Bluffer's Guide Ellis Island

USA, 1892–1954

Did you know?

Ellis Island doctors were famous for their 'six-second physicals' in which they were able to diagnose diseases at a glance

What was it?

A small islet in the shadow of the Statute of Liberty, Ellis Island was the entry point for millions who sought to start a new life in America for over 60 years. Facing an unprecedented wave of new arrivals at the turn of the century, the government established Ellis Island as the first federal immigration inspection station.

Between 1892 and 1924, it is estimated that around 12 million people entered the United States through Ellis Island. However, not all new arrivals to New York City went through the famous facility. The authorities believed first- and second-class steamship passengers were less likely to become a public charge so they only underwent a cursory inspection aboard their ships before passing through customs. Only the poorest immigrants, who travelled in steerage class, were transported to Ellis Island to undergo through medical and legal inspection.

If an immigrant's papers were in order and they were in good health, the process would last three to five hours. But sick passengers could be detained on the 'Island of Tears' until they recovered and passengers ran the risk of being deported if they failed to meet an inspector's standards.

Why did it happen?

The high volume of immigration to the United States at the turn of the 20th century was driven by numerous factors, including political instability and an economic downturn in Europe. Improvements in steam power also improved travel in the late 19th century, shortening the journey from 15.5 days in 1838 to just 4.5 by 1907.

Up until 1892, US immigration was handled at the state level but the unprecedented number of arrivals forced the federal government to intervene. They moved New York's entry point to Ellis Island as its size allowed it to process more people and it provided an area to assess immigrants before they reached the mainland.

Eventually, so-called 'nativist' politicians introduced new restrictions to stem mass migration, such as the 1921 Quota Laws and the 1924 National Origins Act. This signalled the death knell for Ellis Island as an entry point. After 1924, it only held those who had problems with their paperwork, war refugees and other displaced persons.

Who was involved?

Benjamin Harrison
1833–1901
The 23rd president of the United States was responsible for choosing Ellis Island as the new Federal immigration site.

William Williams
1862–1947
As federal commissioner for the port of New York, he was stationed on Ellis Island and tried to rid the facility of corrupt practices.

Annie Moore
1874–1924
Moore is remembered as the first passenger to have been registered on Ellis Island at the age of 17 after travelling from Ireland.

Timeline

1892

The facility officially opens on 1 January and sees around 700 people being vetted for entry to the US.

1897

A fire breaks out, almost completely destroying the original structures. No one is killed but almost all immigration records dating from 1855 are wiped out.

1900

The main building is built at a cost of $1.5 million and designed to host 5,000 immigrants per year. However, the high volume of immigration leads to further extensions.

1907

Ellis Island's busiest year saw approximately 1.25 million pass through the inspection station's gates on the way to New York City.

1924

The Immigration Act introduces quotas for immigrants causing Ellis Island's function changes to that of a detention and deportation centre.

1954

The Ellis Island centre is closed for good, with many other facilities from around the country having since taken up its function.

© Alamy

LONDON'S LOST FROST FAIRS

Discover the carnivals that broke out on the ice when the River Thames was turned into a winter wonderland

Written by Jack Parsons

Sometimes Londoners called it the 'Blanket Fair', other times 'Freezeland Street', 'City Road' or, rather grandiosely, 'Frostiana'. But from 1309 to 1814, whenever the River Thames froze solid, an elaborate carnival would break out the ice.

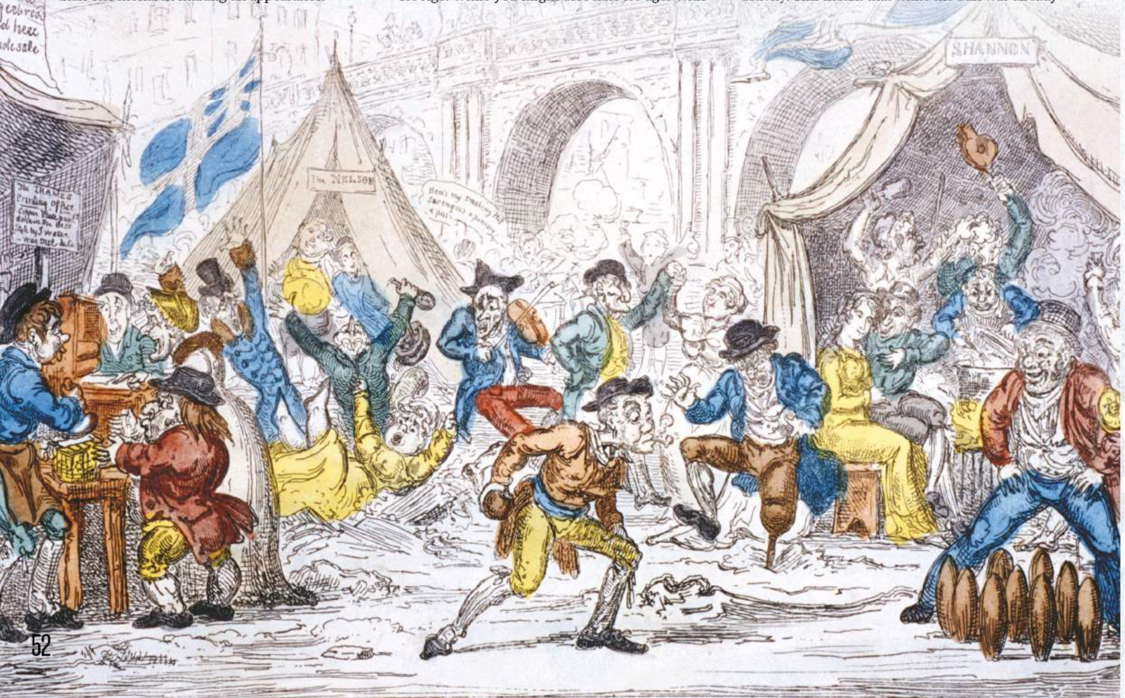
So roll up, roll up! Enter London's lost frost fairs to discover a tent city of hastily assembled shops and pubs, circus performers and a wide variety of games. The rival of any royal extravaganza, expect customers from every strata of society, with more than one monarch making an appearance.

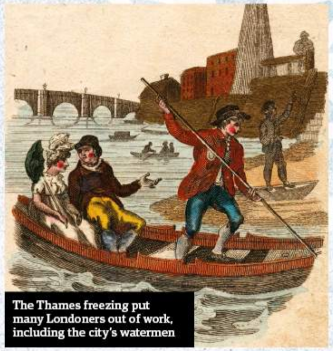
But be warned – its unique position also puts it outside of any authority's jurisdiction, so there are no police to break up fights or catch pickpockets. The ice is also prone to suddenly crack, drowning more than one reveller in the depths below. But this just means the fair-goers to this once-in-a-generation event party like there's no tomorrow.

BEHOLD, THE LIQUID THAMES FROZE O'ER

London's frost fairs were a side effect of the Little Ice Age. While you might associate ice ages with cavemen and woolly mammoths, this one affected the world's climate from the time of the Black Death until the Industrial Revolution. There are earlier accounts of the Thames freezing, such as in 695 and 1092, but these were one-offs. During the Little Ice Age, "the great streams [of England] were congealed" much more frequently.

The Little Ice Age's causes are debated but are believed to have been a perfect storm for climate cooling – huge volcanic eruptions at a time when the Sun was experiencing unusually low sunspot activity. This meant that while the Sun was already giving off less energy to warm the Earth's surface, much of it was being reflected back into space by great plumes of volcanic ash lingering in the stratosphere.




The Thames freezing put many Londoners out of work, including the city's watermen

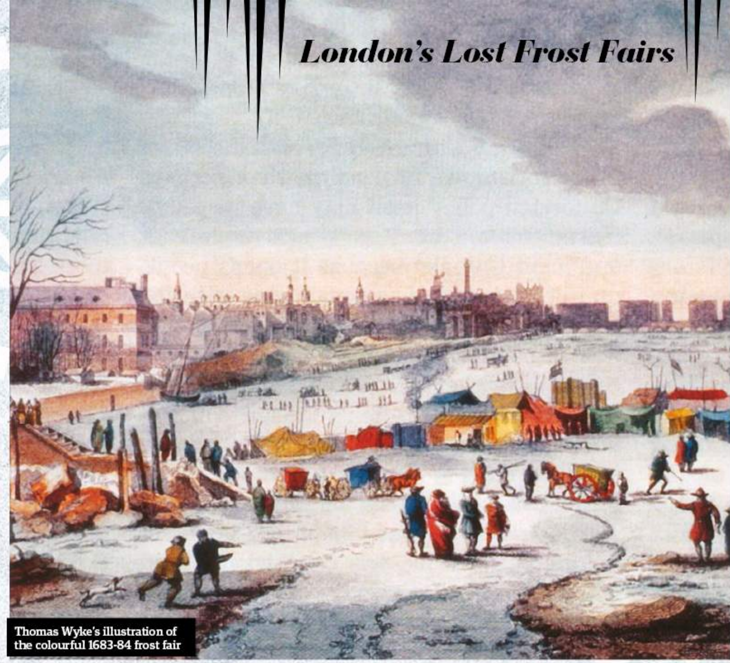
While mean annual temperatures dipping by 0.6°C (1.1°F) across the Northern Hemisphere may not sound a lot, it had a dramatic impact. Europe was particularly affected as atmospheric patterns also blew Arctic air over the continent. Alpine glaciers expanded, obliterating farms and villages in Switzerland, France and elsewhere; Norse colonies in Greenland collapsed after they were cut off by sea ice; frequent cold winters and wet summers led to crop failures; and North Atlantic cod fisheries fled south to warmer waters.

However, while the overall trend was towards the world growing colder from the 14th century until the late 17th century, temperatures still fluctuated year on year. This meant a frost fair on the Thames was not guaranteed each winter and when it did happen, it might last for weeks or just a few days. In fact, there were only 24 known winters during the Little Ice Age in which the portion of the Thames that snakes through London was recorded to have frozen over. On only a handful of those occasions was it was thick enough to host a fair so, with few exceptions, the fairs occurred just once in a generation.

The coldest winter in Britain during this time was the Great Frost of 1683-84. The Thames froze for ten weeks, with ice as thick as 28 centimetres (11 inches). Trees split as if hit by lightning and boats were crushed by the pressure of the ice. Beyond London, there were reports of solid ice extending for miles off the coasts of the southern North Sea, while the ground was frozen to depths of 69 centimetres (27 inches) near Manchester and 1.2 metres (4 feet) in Somerset.

Another factor that contributed specifically to the Thames freezing in the capital was the building of the Old London Bridge. Finished in 1205, this crossing was the main route to ferry people, goods and livestock from the City of London to Southwark for 600 years. But this Medieval bridge was supported by 19 closely packed arches, each boasting large piers known as starlings, and their breakwaters slowed the river down, making it more susceptible to freezing.

Large pieces of ice would also lodge among the arches, gradually blocking them and acting like a dam, preventing salty seawater to pass up the river that would have otherwise lowered the freezing point. Whether it was because the frozen river was thickest near the bridge or due to it being in the heart of the city, it was around this area that the city's frost fairs would generally be held.


Thomas Wyke's illustration of the colourful 1683-84 frost fair

"LONDON'S FROST FAIRS WERE A SIDE EFFECT OF THE LITTLE ICE AGE"

WATERMEN MAKE USE OF BOOTHS TO GET THEIR PENCE

In 1309, an anonymous chronicler noted that the Thames froze at Christmas "and it lasted so long that people danced in the midst of it near a fire." However, the first fair of significance opened on 21 December 1564 and lasted through to January. Raphael Holinshed recorded boys playing football "as boldlie [sic] there as if it had been on the drie [sic] land".

The frozen Thames must have been a wondrous sight, stretching for miles in all directions but the seizing up of the city's main artery also put many livelihoods at risk. Brewers, bakers and washerwomen all struggled without a source of running water. However, the worst hit were the watermen, who transported people along the river in little boats. It's thought they established the frost fairs out of necessity.

In 1621, the freeze lasted for eight weeks, so the out-of-work watermen guarded at the water-stairs, charging Londoners who wanted to step on the ice. Audaciously, another set of watermen would then charge them again when they got off on the opposite bank.

With this in mind, the watermen also set up a number of attractions to lure customers onto the river. They converted their boats into makeshift sleds to carry customers along the ice and sold food and drink from tents made of blankets resting upon crossed oar frames. It is unclear if this was the first time the watermen had organised a fair themselves or if they were doing as their predecessors had in previous years.

It wasn't long before others cashed in. Hackney coachmen drove their horses out onto the ice to compete for custom on the new white highway. Traders set up their own booths and stalls, selling goods superior to anything the watermen could produce. Soon they had an entire street of primitive shops on the river.

In 1683, the Watermen's Company appealed to the Court of Aldermen for help. They argued that as their guild had been given royal assent to operate the country's waterways, they should have a monopoly on all river trade – including the frost fairs. While they had their sympathisers, the ethos of individualism and competition emerging at the close of the 17th century meant the court ruled against them. That winter saw the river host one of the largest frost fairs on record.

"A CARNIVAL ON THE WATER"

The frost fairs boasted numerous attractions to lure Londoners onto the ice

01 Archery on ice

The Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I, went out on the ice every day when the river froze in 1564 to shoot targets. This year also saw the first proper frost fair, where royal courtiers mixed with London's commoners.

02 Printing press

Printers were a popular attraction at many frost fairs, printing customers' names onto commemorative souvenirs. While early fair-goers were mostly illiterate and settled for simple postcards, by 1814 ballads and books were sold on the ice.

03 Marching elephant

While the 1814 fair only lasted a few days, some modern sources have claimed that the ice was so strong that "a very fine elephant was led across the Thames a little below Blackfriars Bridge." However, there is little contemporary evidence to back up this extraordinary assertion.

04 Animal baiting

Bear-baiting, bull-baiting and the curious if cruel-sounding 'men throwing at cocks' were among the more bloodthirsty entertainments available at the fair.

05 Fox hunting

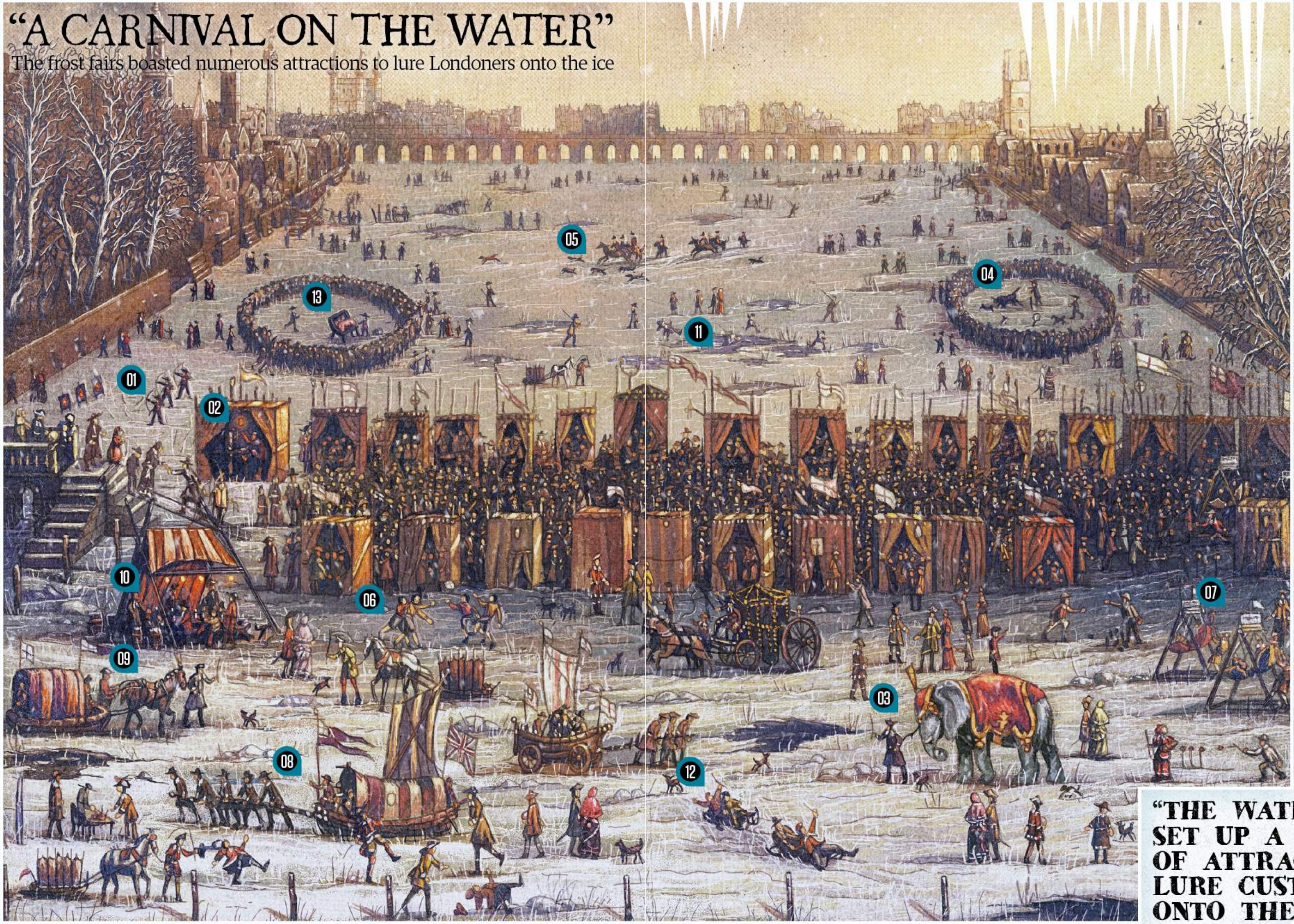
The river hosted a foxhunt in 1683-84, though it's unclear if the animal was wild or trapped and released for the sport. Some have suggested Charles II participated but this seems unlikely.

06 Winter sports

There are several accounts of football being played on the ice during the fairs, along with hockey, nine-pin bowling, and horse and donkey racing.

07 Fairground attractions

Adding to the carnival feel, large wooden swings that could hold up to six revellers were a common sight at frost fairs in 18th century.



08 Ride the draw boat

Fair-goers could ride in boats fitted with wheels and decorated with streamers. These could be blown along using sails or pulled with ropes by the out-of-work watermen.

09 One-horse open sleigh

While Henry VIII travelled from central London to Greenwich by sleigh along the frozen river in 1536, hackney coach drivers frequently taxied ordinary Londoners along the ice as well.

10 Temporary taverns

Frost fairs boasted "more liquor than the fish beneath do drink". with stalls selling beer, ale, brandy and gin. Others established temporary taverns with benches to sit on.

11 Beware thin ice

As well as the risk of slipping over, many Londoners drowned when the ice cracked. In 1739, a large sheet collapsed as the river defrosted, swallowing up several tents full of people.

12 Ice skating

Before the invention of iron skates in 1667, London's youth tied animal bones to their feet and reportedly reached "a velocity equal to the flight of a bird."

13 Roasting ox

As well as stalls selling gingerbread, hot pudding pies and spiced apples, revellers could warm themselves while watching the spectacles such as the roasting of a sheep or a whole ox.

> "THE WATERMEN ALSO SET UP A NUMBER OF ATTRACTIONS TO LURE CUSTOMERS ONTO THE RIVER"

DANGERS ON THE ICE

Hazel Forsyth from the Museum of London warns that walking on the frozen river came with risks

How did the Thames freezing affect London?

The rarity of the event caused people to enjoy it but the reality was rather different for the economy. A large amount of London's goods were transported via the river, either through coastal trade or small vessels carrying cargo to and from ocean-going ships.

The ease of transporting heavy or perishable goods was very profound and affected everyone. Unless people had stockpiled in anticipation, they were probably suffering severe hardship. The City made attempts to stockpile fuel in various warehousing across London but those supplies dwindled from time to time. Of course, whenever you have a shortage of anything, prices go up, so those who were less able to afford things would have been more impoverished. Communication would also have been very difficult.

What did the frozen river look like?

The paintings in our collection suggest it looked almost like an Arctic landscape with vast, sort of jagged piles of ice. People have tended to say 'this is just a load of nonsense, but it can't possibly have been like that'. But actually if you look at the way pack ice forms, I think it's very accurate.

How much of the River Thames froze?

To be honest, we don't know as there isn't detailed enough information. It's fair to say it froze between the City of London and Westminster – beyond that, it's very difficult to know. The likelihood is that the river was fairly solid in both directions but there may have been gaps and so much would have depended on local conditions. If it was fairly windy, ice could break up and then harden again downstream. The fact that the Thames froze didn't mean it was all solid and possible to stand on – only patches were strong enough.

Did many people fall through the ice?

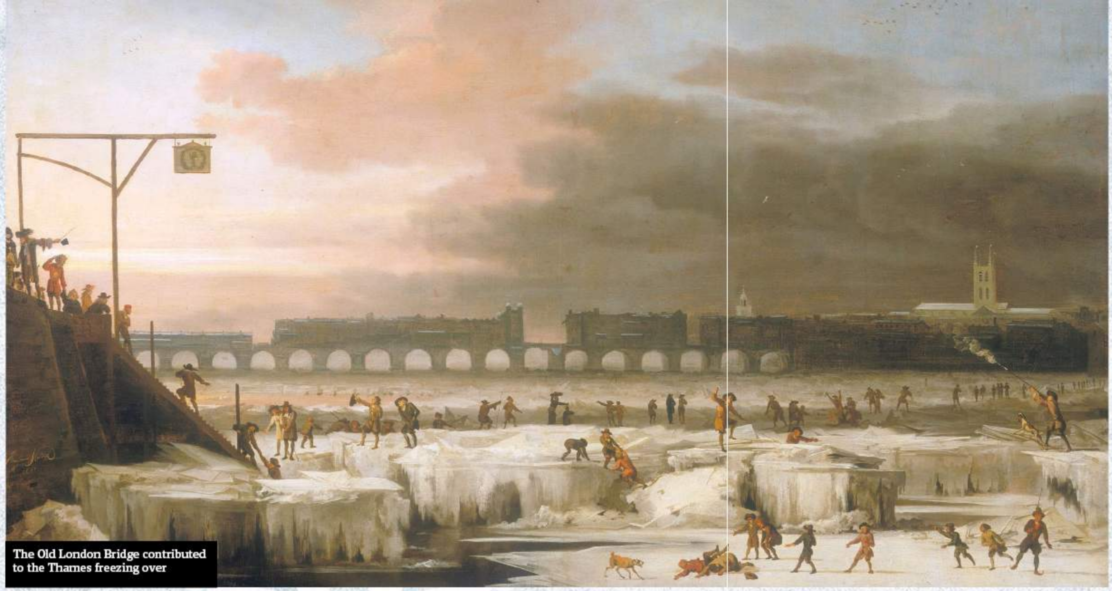
Every time [the river froze], people stepped onto the ice thinking it was stronger than it really was and suffered as a consequence. There were lots of broken bones, dunkings and fatalities.

One of the most famous deaths was recorded in John Gay's poem *Trivia*. It's about the fate of a fruit vender who apparently staggered under the weight of her great basket of hot apples and disappeared below the ice. He said, "Her head, chopt off, from her lost shoulders flies". Then there's this rather dramatic account of "And pip-pip-pip- along the ice resounds" as her hot pippins bobbed against the ice.

Did any fair booths get caught unawares?

There was a booth set up by Mister Laurence of Queenhithe, near Brooke Wharf, at the 1814 fair. I guess he thought two men could guard it overnight, leaving them with some gin and some other bits and pieces to keep them going. In the morning there were reportedly nine people inside [the tent], then the ice started to break apart and move downstream. They escaped by climbing onto the piers at Blackfriars Bridge and a couple of adjacent barges. They were very fortunate.

The Museum of London is hosting a Thames frost fair storytelling event on 30-31 December and the Museum of London Docklands is also hosting a fair-themed art project on 22-23 December. Both events are free and family friendly. For more info, visit museumoflondon.org.uk



The Old London Bridge contributed to the Thames freezing over

"FROST FAIRS WERE AS MUCH LIKE AN ILLEGAL RAVE OR A CIRCUS AS THEY WERE A CHRISTMAS MARKET"

Known as the Blanket Fair, it lasted from December 1683 to February 1684. A double row of booths stretched from Temple Stairs to the South Bank. Oxen and "Lapland mutton" spit roasts drew crowds and stalls sold spiced buns, hot pudding pies and gingerbread, while costermongers wandered around selling fruits and nuts. In the makeshift taverns you could get warming luxuries like coffee and hot chocolate, but customers would be welcomed with the greeting "What lack ye, sir? Beer, ale or brandy?"

Hawkers sold souvenirs from simple trinkets and children's toys to golden jewellery. Some forward-thinking businessmen also used the fair as a publicity stunt. Barbers demonstrated that even on ice their razors would not slip and a printer set up their press in the open air.

The press proved particularly successful, selling poems that customers could also have their names printed on. The diarist John Evelyn noted with astonishment "'twas estimated the printer gained about £5 a day for printing a line onely [sic] at sixpence a name, besides what he got by ballads." Meanwhile, the watermen barely managed to scrape by while fending off the Water Bailiff, who was trying to tax their little booths.

'TIS DONE WITH GREAT DELIGHT

In 1599, William Shakespeare's theatre company dismantled their old playhouse in Shoreditch and transported the wooden frame over the Thames, reassembling it as the Globe in Southwark. The story goes that the actors hauled the timbers across the icy river in the dead of night. The Bard wrote *Much Ado About Nothing* the same year, so you can imagine the actor playing Don Pedro declaring, "Good morrow, Bendeick. Why, what's the matter, / That you have such a February face, / So full of frost, of storms and cloudiness?" to a fair-goers who knew just how cold that look must have been. But although the Thames was "nigh frozen over" the night they moved to the Globe, they went be boat – the ice was too thin to stand on. There's sadly no account of Shakespeare or his players capitalising on the frost fairs. However, others certainly did.

As one souvenir handbill from 1684 read: "Behold the wonder of this present age / A frozen river now becomes a stage." While food and drink were popular attractions, frost fairs were as much like an illegal rave or a circus as they were a Christmas market. Music blared, entertainers recited bawdy verse and puppet shows were held. A "human salamander" seemingly ate glowing hot coals, sword-swallowers amazed audiences, an astrologer calling himself 'Icedore Frostiface of Freeseland' read fortunes, and figures on stilts wandered among the crowds.

A menagerie of exotic animals was also on display, ranging from a dog that could do tricks, to a cage full of monkeys, to "a booth with a phenix [sic] on it." One such exhibitor in 1684 was James William Chipperfield, whose family developed the Chipperfield Circus into an elaborate show that endured until the 1950s.

As well as sledging and skating, there were also games you could pay to play. Along with nine-pin bowling and hoopla, Londoners enjoyed the dizzy experience of a 'Dutch whimsie' – being spun around in a chair or a boat tied to a pole. Every roundabout in modern playgrounds is thought to be a descendent of this "whirling sledge".

John Evelyn called the 1684 fair a "bacchanalian triumph, or carnival on the water", while his equally prudish contemporary Roger Morrice complained, "All manner of debauchery upon the Thames continued upon the Lord's Day and Monday". Fair-goers could gamble and likely placed wagers on regular attractions like horse racing and blood sports. As well as seeing bears and bulls fight dogs, "throwing at cocks" was promoted at the 1684 fair. This involved a rooster being tied to a post and participants taking turns to throw weighted sticks at the bird until it died.

Prostitutes also ambled among the attractions, soliciting customers. The beleaguered watermen complained about women plying their trade in the Hackney coaches but it's likely some of the tents served as brothels. With the waterman offering the only thing close to security, revellers had to watch out for pickpockets, too.

While Evelyn and Moore bemoaned the frost fair as a sign of social decay, others praised it for breaking down hierarchies. An event to rival any royal extravaganza, high society couldn't resist the fun and games and even the poorest could at least enjoy the spectacle and get warm by a bonfire.

The dramatist Thomas Dekker noted the mixing "of all ages, of both sexes, of all professions" on the "common path" of the Thames in 1608. John Taylor, a part-time poet and possibly the only waterman to praise the frozen river, wrote approvingly, "Laws they count no more than Esops [sic] fables." Perhaps this was because of the frozen Thames' unique position outside of conventional authority's jurisdiction, the fair's overwhelming carnivalesque atmosphere, or because the ice was impermanent, so it was understood to only be a temporary suspension of social etiquette.

Despite the behaviour the fairs encouraged, even royalty couldn't resist. Queen Elizabeth I walked upon the ice daily in 1564 to "shoot a few marks" with bow and arrow. King Charles II went one step further at the Blanket Fair, attending with some of the royal family to see "Great Britain's wonder" on 31 January 1684. He even bought a memento from one of the printers, stamped with the date and their names. A French account claimed the Merry Monarch spent a whole night at the fair, while others say he joined in a foxhunt on the ice. Perhaps while accompanying the king, the royal army also fired a ceremonial salute with several cannons on the ice.

SEE WHAT THINGS UPON THE ICE WERE DONE

There were more frost fairs in the 18th century and they offered much the same attractions. In 1715, live entertainment was provided by "Will Ellis the Poet and his wife Bess" who were "Rhiming [sic] on the Hard Frost." Ox was again roasted by a Mr Atkins and Mr Hodginson, who claimed to be the descendents of the gentleman who had done the same in 1684. The painter William Hogarth bought a souvenir print for his pet pug, Trump. However, these later fairs also saw greater mechanisation, so the fairground attractions looked more like today's with swing sets and – sources claim – some sort of clockwork car went on display.

The final fair was held in February 1814 and though it only lasted a few days, it went out in style. The ice followed a thick fog that enveloped the city and the surrounding country, allegedly lasting from 27 December 1813 to 3 January 1814.

Once it cleared, a grand mall was set-up by Blackfriars Bridge, dubbed 'City Street', boasting temporary taverns with names like 'The City of Moscow', 'The Free and Easy' and 'Wellington Forever'. At least ten printers were set up and sold books with their postcards and poems while a full-blown casino offered roulette and a wheel of fortune. The watermen assumed their old position, charging two- or threepence for safe passage onto the ice. As the Londoners descended onto the frozen Thames en masse once more, a group of 70 people reportedly walked across the frozen water to South Bank all at once.

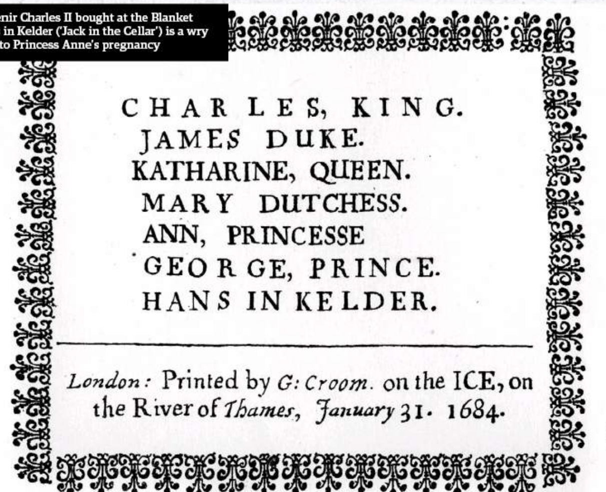
Various modern accounts claim an elephant walked across the ice at the final fair. While we would like to say this was led by a descendent of the Blanket Fair's James William Chipperfield, whose family's circus was now a booming success, the story may sadly be apocryphal. There are no known records from 1814 mentioning the animal, which would surely have been a talking point.

The fair lasted just four days as so many people and milder temperatures caused cracks to quickly appear in the ice. More than one person drowned and booths were carried away on ice flows. Damage to river barges was estimated at some £20,000, caused by giant fast-flowing chunks that had broken up. But even then, a large printing press, hungry for profits, was set up in defiance on an ice island near Westminster.

The Thames did freeze again after 1814 but not to the extent that anyone could walk on it. The Little Ice Age was drawing to a close, ending after 1850, but the frost fairs were also a victim of progress. The Old London Bridge was beyond repair and had to be replaced in 1830 by the modern London Bridge. This, plus the creation of the Embankment in the 19th century, created a narrower, faster-flowing Thames that was less likely to freeze.

London's lost frost fairs were always a celebration of impermanence, with participants never sure when the party would be over or when the floor was going to give way beneath their feet. We could never expect them to last forever.

The souvenir Charles II bought at the Blanket Fair. Hans in Kelder ('Jack in the Cellar') is a wry reference to Princess Anne's pregnancy



CHARLES, KING.
JAMES DUKE.
KATHARINE, QUEEN.
MARY DUTCHESS.
ANN, PRINCESSE
GEORGE, PRINCE.
HANS IN KELDER.

London: Printed by G: Croom. on the ICE, on the River of Thames, January 31. 1684.

Time Traveller's Handbook

COLONIAL BRAZIL

Brazil, 17th century

Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral planted the nation's flag on the Brazilian shore as early as 1500, but over 100 years later only a few trading posts have been established on the east coast. While the Portuguese Empire focuses on expansion into India and the Far East, Brazil has been divided into 15 captaincies that are run by Portuguese nobles. They run these as their own private fiefdoms while logging brazilwood trees for its extremely valuable red dye.

But in São Paulo, still the only inland settlement of any size, second- and third-generation settlers are exploring the country's interior, including its mountainous highlands and deep jungle. These explorers, or bandeirantes, travel in groups of several hundred, following the river courses on journeys that last months or years. Hoping to find gold or emeralds, the main source of wealth for most of them is capturing the indigenous Tupi they meet and selling them into slavery.

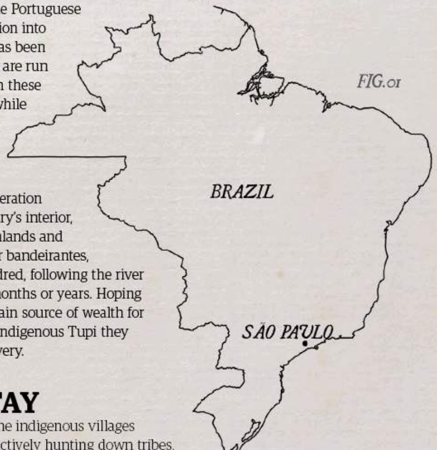


FIG.01

WHERE TO STAY

Make sure to stay away from the indigenous villages because the bandeirantes are actively hunting down tribes, enslaving whoever they can and exterminating the rest. This means that many of the indigenous people are hostile to outsiders, even leading their own raiding parties.

Jesuit missionaries have set up fortified communities known as 'reductions' to try and protect the natives. But the slavers are growing increasingly brazen and have even started attacking these refugee camps. São Paulo is your safest option. This future megacity is still a very poor frontier town, notable only for its large Jesuit college, but it is well defended.

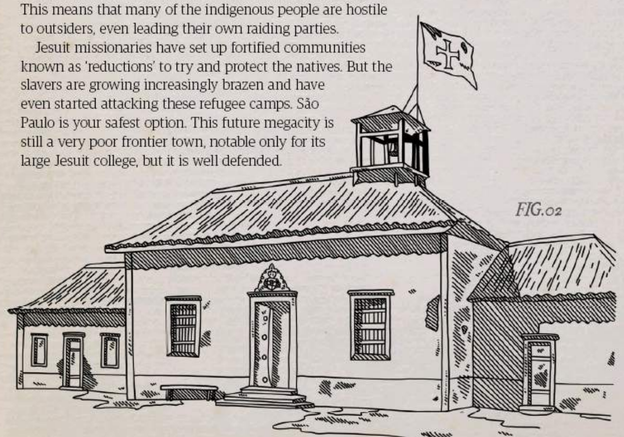


FIG.02

Dos & don'ts

☑ **Sleep in a hammock.** Keeping off the forest floor at night is the only way to avoid being eaten alive by insects.

☑ **Wear thick clothing.** Although the heat can be fierce, the spiny vegetation of the barren hinterland is even worse. Leather chaps and jackets are a must.

☑ **Bring trinkets and cloth.** If you aren't a hardened survivalist, trading with friendly tribes is your best chance of getting food outside the coastal towns.

☑ **Cover your mouth when you sneeze.** Indigenous tribes have no resistance to European diseases and tens of thousands will die in smallpox and influenza epidemics.

☒ **Mistake the phrase 'drogas de sertão' for narcotics.** Bandeirantes use this term, meaning 'wilderness drugs,' to cover many herbs and plants including Brazil nuts, cocoa, guarana and cloves.

☒ **Worry about the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas.** The boundary between the Spanish and Portuguese empires in South America will be redrawn in 1750 anyway, thanks to the bandeirantes.

☒ **Be surprised to see Tupi in the bandeiras.** Most of the expedition workforce is made up of indigenous people, employed or owned by the white bandeirantes.

☒ **Be fooled by dancing slaves.** They may be practicing capoeira, a martial art that is disguised as a dance, to avoid suspicion.

WHO TO BEFRIEND

Antônio Raposo Tavares

Although he is as much a slave hunter as his fellow bandeirantes, Antônio Raposo Tavares has also done more to expand Brazil's borders than anyone else. If you are in São Paulo in 1654, you might be able meet him as he returns from his most recent expedition, which has taken seven years. Covering more than 10,000 kilometres, he has pushed inland all the way to the Andes mountains. But of the 1,200 men who set out with him, only 60 or so remain and Tavares is a changed man. Exhaustion and malnutrition will kill him within a few years, too.

Extra tip:
The bandeirantes are an insular group who all know each other. For example, the famous bandeirante Manuel de Borba Gato is the son-in-law of the even more famous Fernão Dias Pais Leme. Tavares has been married twice, both times to the daughters of other bandeirantes.

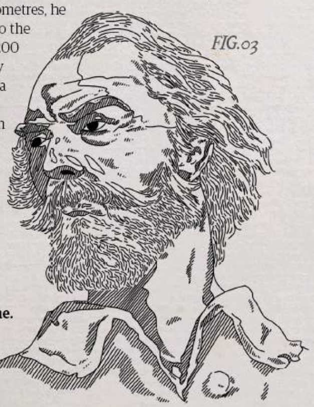


FIG.03

WHO TO AVOID

Domingos Jorge Velho

Representing a new generation of bandeirantes, Domingos Jorge Velho is one of the most ruthless. In the second half of the 17th century, many bandeirantes are acting less as entrepreneurs and explorers and more as enforcers for the local white landowners and cattle ranchers of the northeast of Brazil. Velho has led multiple expeditions that have completely exterminated several South American tribes and his brutality extends to African slaves, too. In 1694, this cruel mercenary will lead the assault to crush a community of more than 10,000 escaped slaves at Palmares on Brazil's east coast.

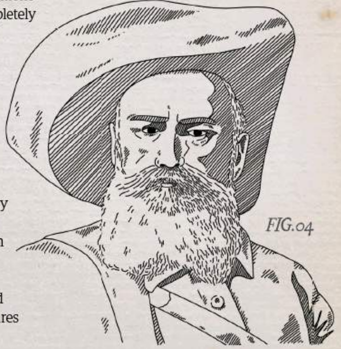


FIG.04

Helpful skills

If you plan to join one of the expeditionary bandeiras, you'll need more than just backwoods survival skills

FIG.05

Lingua Geral

The 'general language', or Lingua Geral, is a fusion of Portuguese and the indigenous Tupi language. It's so widespread that it's the first language of some of the bandeirantes.

Musketry

Whether you need to defend yourself against raiding native tribes or mutinous bandeirantes, knowing how to prime, load and fire a flintlock musket will be essential once you venture into the interior.

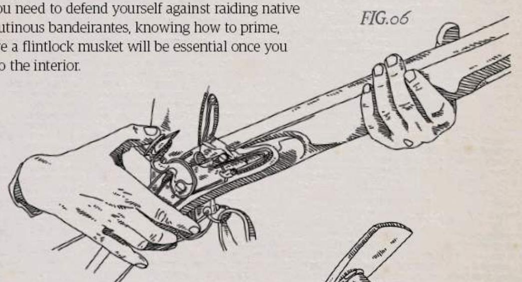


FIG.06

Geology

Fernão Dias Pais Leme bankrupted his family to outfit a bandeira in search of emeralds and came back almost empty-handed after four years. But there is gold in the Minas Gerais region.

FIG.07

What if…

Richard I and Saladin had intermarried?

An unusual proposition during the Third Crusade could have heralded peace in the Medieval Middle East

Written by Jonathan O'Callaghan

What was the cause of the Third Crusade from 1189 to 1192?
The immediate cause was the pope's call for the crusade after Saladin [the first sultan of Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Yemen] captured Jerusalem. We have a papal accord to the Christians to go to the aid of their fellow Christians in the East. It's a family matter as well because King Henry II of England was a cousin of the rulers of Jerusalem and Richard I [son of Henry II, king from 1189 to 1199] was a first cousin once removed – so it wasn't just a religious motivation.

What did Richard I, or Richard the Lionheart, hope to achieve by leading the Crusade into the Middle East?
Well, nobody actually said 'this is what our aims are' and so we have to assume them from letters sent back to the West and from what people did. On the basis of the papal accord, we reckon that they wanted to recapture Jerusalem. We also suspect that they wished to set up a regime in the East that would be agreeable to all concerned – that is to say the Latin Christians in the West and the Franks settled in the East. It also would have preferably been [a regime] that was at least acceptable to Saladin and his successors because they needed a peace treaty to hold the lands that they had recovered. They did set up a new regime and they also managed to recapture some coastal towns – but they didn't manage to regain Jerusalem.

INTERVIEW WITH… HELEN NICHOLSON

Professor of Medieval History at Cardiff University, Helen Nicholson is a world-leading scholar on the Crusades and its military religious orders. Her research interests include women in the Crusades, the trials of the Knights Templar in Britain and the use of Medieval literature as historical evidence.

What sort of ruler was Saladin and what were his motivations?
Saladin's quite difficult to get at because we have [Islamic] histories of him written by people who were quite anxious to assure everyone who read them that he was very spiritually minded, noble, heroic and a just ruler. While we can't deny any of these things, it would be nice to have an opposing view to give it a bit more balance.

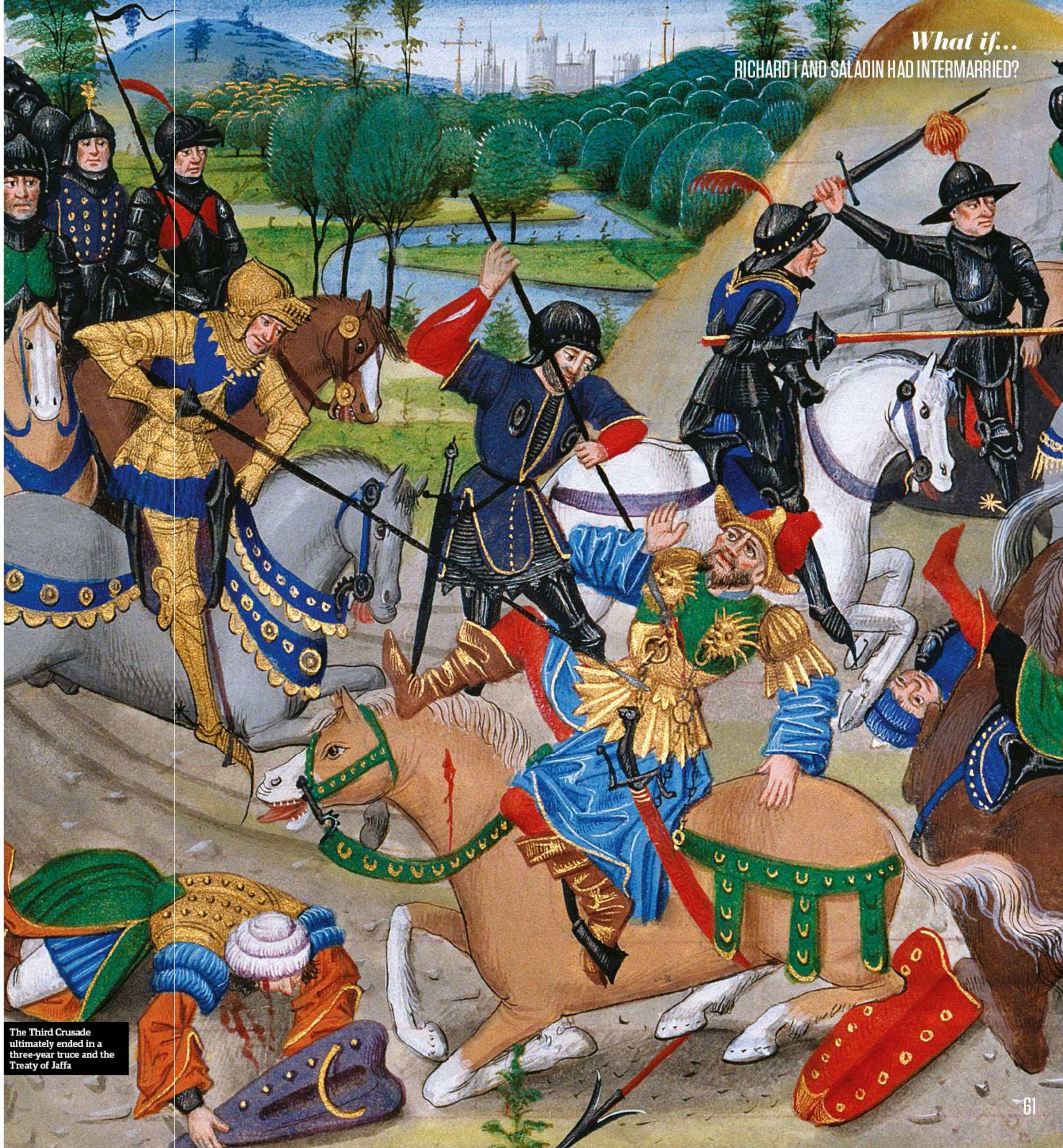
There are people who regarded Saladin as a usurper, a conqueror, not the valid ruler. He spent most of his life fighting other Muslims to try and establish his regime, and throughout the Third Crusade he had to negotiate with his own army – and the various groups that made up his army – to hold them together. There were points where he had to let people go back home to get in the harvest or carry out their own business. He was having problems and so he had to keep winning victories to keep his army together.

What was the relationship like between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin?
Contemporaries were interested in their continual sending of messages back and forth. The first thing Richard did [when he arrived] was to send a message to Saladin and open negotiations for peace. Of course, according to both sides it was the other that started negotiations.

The Western sources were concerned about Richard's apparent friendship with Saladin although the two never actually met. But Saladin's brother, al-Adil, did go to meet Richard and this looked quite suspicious to Western writers.

On the other side, the picture was exactly the same if reversed. Sources around Saladin were very suspicious of Richard, thinking he was extremely clever, cunning and untrustworthy. They wanted to know what he was up to and they thought Saladin ws being far too friendly.

> "He had to keep winning victories to keep his army together"



The Third Crusade ultimately ended in a three-year truce and the Treaty of Jaffa

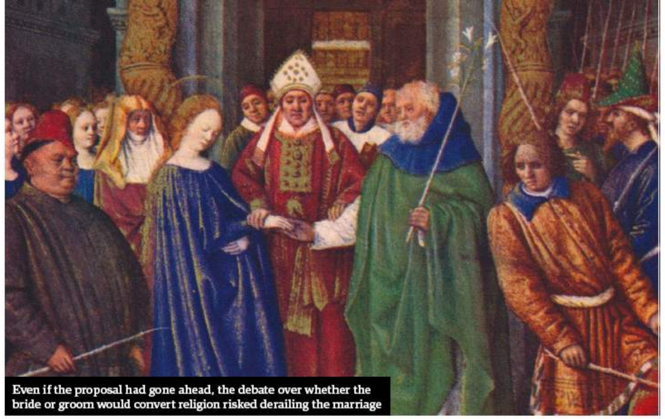
It's quite amusing, if a little sad, to imagine both side's outside commentators were so suspicious while the leaders were desperately trying to work around each other with detailed negotiations, very long-winded, spread out diplomacy, and the exchanging of gifts. Their relationship is described as friendly by some Western sources but I think mutual respect is probably a bit more accurate.

In 1191, Richard made an unusual proposition to marry his widowed sister Joan to Saladin's brother, al-Adil. What did Saladin make of this idea?
For a long time I thought it must be a myth introduced by Arab sources because the contemporary Western ones don't mention it at all. However, talking about it with two students of mine, we've decided that it could be true and it was probably a negotiating ploy by Richard. From the point of view of Saladin, this would not have been impossible – sultans had married Christian women before. Joan would have been allowed to keep her own religion so it wouldn't have been denigrating for either side. But they didn't trust Richard and they didn't know what he was up to. I'm sure their first reaction was, "He said what?! He can't mean that."

What do you think Richard did it?
Why did Richard take Joan to the East with him from Sicily? He had his wife, Berengaria, with him, so he may well have taken Joan along to keep her company. But why didn't he send Joan back home with her mother, Eleanor, who came to Sicily to meet him?

The fact that Richard took Joan with him suggests he had something up his sleeve – perhaps he was thinking of setting up a dynasty out there. She could become queen of Jerusalem. What Joan says about this we don't know, because nobody bothered to record her opinion.

For the Western sources, particularly the Epics, it's all part of that great Hollywood romance – although of course it's not Hollywood, it's the Crusade Cycle. Why shouldn't she marry a Muslim prince who converts to Christianity? How seriously Richard meant it is now impossible to say. If he intended to completely floor his Muslim counterparts and leave them guessing as to what he might be up to, he certainly succeeded.



Even if the proposal had gone ahead, the debate over whether the bride or groom would convert religion risked derailing the marriage

Why did the proposal not go ahead?
Saladin didn't know what to do with it. He seemed quite bewildered as to whether Richard could possibly have meant it. I can look up what it says in [*The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin* by Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, a 12th-century Muslim scholar] about 21 October, 1191: "The essential basis of the agreement depends on al-Adil marrying the King of England's sister, who he brought with him from Sicily... the seat of the realm would be Jerusalem."

They went to Saladin and read it out, and Saladin "hastened to express approval of these terms, believing the King of England would not agree to them at all, and that it was intended to mock and deceive him." Saladin didn't believe it. So they went back to Richard and effectively called his bluff.

Then we come to 11 November, and the question is will al-Adil convert to Christianity, and the discussion is continuing, and Saladin says he's happy with it. But now Richard has changed his mind. "The assembled Christian folk have criticised me for subjecting my sister to a Muslim without consulting the Pope. So I am now sending an envoy who will return in three months." This was the point at which negotiations broke down.

What would have happened if it had gone ahead?
Well, Muslim rulers had married Christians before. Of course, Muslims didn't have to have just one wife, so the Christian queen's children would then be in the position of not knowing whether they would succeed to rule Saladin's lands. I'm not sure anyone had thought it through that far.

Both sides would assume the other side could convert because, of course, each would have known that their religion was the most righteous and true. It's quite sweet the way contemporary literature of both sides reflects this belief and you look back over 800 years of history and think it's a shame, really – it would have been nice.

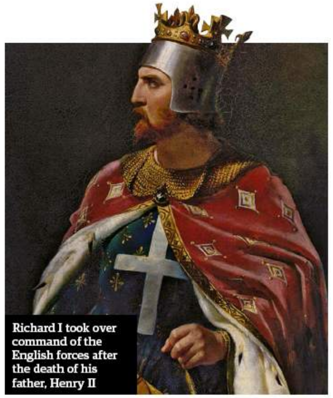
If it had gone ahead, if one side had been ready to convert to the other religion, they probably would have been stopped by their supporters because Muslims are not going to be happy to see al-Adil convert to Christianity, and likewise Richard's advisers are not going to be happy to see a Christian princess converted to Islam.

It would be like a peace treaty in the 1950s between the Soviet Union and the US that had required the US president's sister to convert to communism and marry Joseph Stalin. One feels it would have been unlikely to happen.

Would this unlikely marriage have brought an end to the Crusades?
Yes, it would have been the end of the Crusades as such. It would probably have been very good for trade, too – until the Mongols invaded [in the 1220s] and disrupted all the trade routes to the East, which would have happened anyway. Whether this new united kingdom could have stood against the Mongol invasion, I don't know.

What else might have been different?
There would have been peaceful pilgrimage into Jerusalem for people from Western Europe and also for Muslims – and Jews, of course. The pilgrimage would probably have been easier for both sides. The end of the fighting might also have meant that trade would be easier. People's crops wouldn't be getting burned down all the time.

To judge from comments by people campaigning for Crusades in the 13th century, they made remarks like "we have to fight these people, we can't possibly make peace with them." It suggests there were quite a lot of people saying why don't we just make peace, rather than going to war. I think it would have been a good idea – but then I'm sitting here in the early 21st century. My values are not necessarily theirs.



Richard I took over command of the English forces after the death of his father, Henry II

How different would our modern view have been of this period?
Until very recently, scholars didn't really look at the peace negotiations at all or the attempts to bring people together as in the case of this one. The religious zealots on both sides had no interest in promoting the fact that people were trying to make peace.

So much of the literature that's come down to us emphasised the fact that war was necessary, whereas in fact when you go back and look at what people said at the time, there was a lot of talk about peace-making.

However, if we put that on the internet in the hope that it might generate positive discussion between Muslims and Christians, you just get hate mail in response. All I got was people telling me from both sides there was no way anyone could make peace with this appalling infidel. That came from both sides. So I thought, oh, there's not much hope that peace is going to break out on this planet in the near future, unfortunately.

But things could have been different?
There is always hope that it could be different. It's particularly interesting that these people who were regarded as the foremost leaders of the holy war on each side were the people who were actually prepared to make peace. Unless they were both faking it.

> "Whether this new united kingdom could have stood against the Mongol invasion, I don't know"

How would it be different?

Real timeline

Third Crusade
Pope Gregory VIII issues a call for a new Crusade to the Holy Land to recapture Jerusalem from the sultan Saladin. **1189**

Richard departs
King Richard sets sail for the Middle East, where he immediately makes contact with his counterpart, Saladin. **1190**

Tolouse.
Johanne contesse

The proposal
Richard makes a bizarre proposal to Saladin – that the former's sister Joan marry the latter's brother al-Adil, uniting their families to broker peace. **October 1191**

Real timeline

No marriage
Negotiations stall as both Richard and Saladin's advisers strongly encourage their leaders not to go ahead with the marriage. **December 1191**

The Crusade ends
Richard departs the Holy Land, having failed to recapture Jerusalem, but making inroads in a number of coastal regions. **October 1192**

Death of Saladin
Saladin dies of fever five months after Richard leaves, bringing their somewhat respectful relationship to an end. **March 1193**

Death of Richard
Richard I dies of a rogue crossbow bolt wound during the siege of Châlus-Chabrol in Haute-Vienne, France. **April 1199**

Fourth Crusade
Pope Innocent II calls for another excursion to the Holy Land, at first to recapture Jerusalem, but later to sack the city of Constantinople. **1202**

Mongols invade
The Mongols sweep into the Middle East, disrupting trade heading east and causing havoc. **1220s**

Last Crusade
The ninth and last Crusade comes to an end with Jerusalem still not recaptured and Muslims and Christians as divided as ever. **1272**

Alternate timeline

Wedding bells
Richard's proposal is accepted and his sister Joan weds Saladin's brother al-Adil in a stunning marriage of two different faiths. **November 1191**

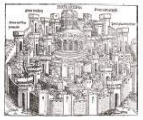
Queen of Jerusalem
Joan becomes queen of Jerusalem and, with the aid of her brother Richard, sets up a new regime in the kingdom. **December 1191**

Lasting peace
With Jerusalem now partly under Christian control, the Crusades come to an end and the fighting between Richard and Saladin's sources ceases. **1192**

Trade deals
Trade flourishes between Europe and the Middle East, with few skirmishes or broken alliances taking place between factions. **1193**

Richard lives
Richard is never killed by a crossbow bolt at a castle in France and remains king for decades more. **1199**

Jerusalem defended
The new kingdom of Jerusalem is able to withstand the Mongol invasion, keeping peace in the Middle East. **1220s**



Faiths aligned
The Muslim and Christian faiths live in harmony 50 years after the marriage of Joan and al-Adil, who leave a dynasty in their wake. **1241**

OPERATION UNDERWORLD

When the East Coast was under threat from Nazi spies and submarines, the US Navy found an unlikely champion: the mafia. But was America's alliance with the criminal underworld a spying success or big mob con?

Written by
Ben Biggs

Just a few months after its explosive entry into World War II, the US suffered another significant naval casualty. USS Lafayette, an 80,000-ton former French ocean liner, caught fire and capsized in New York Harbor in February 1942. Commandeered by the authorities, the ship was in the process of being converted into troop transport when it sank. Happening so soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the government immediately suspected enemy sabotage. A congressional investigation eventually ruled the disaster an accident but the incident exposed how vulnerable the East Coast was to infiltration by Axis agents.

U-boats had been spotted patrolling in packs along the coastline. German torpedoes were taking out dozens of merchant ships – on their way to resupply Allied forces in Europe – every month. In June, German agents were captured on Long Island with explosives, maps and details of strategic installations along the waterfront (see 'Hitler's Doomed Sabotage Mission', page 67).

The US had become complacent during peacetime and had dropped the ball as far as military intelligence was concerned. But after USS Lafayette went down, it prompted the head of the Office of Navy Intelligence (ONI), Commander Charles Radcliffe Haffenden, to launch a counter-espionage initiative. He wanted all eyes and ears to the ground in the dockyards.

The trouble was that some of the workers and proliferate criminals in that area, particularly along the piers, were suspected of assisting Axis spies and saboteurs. Lieutenant O'Malley of the ONI later wrote in a post-war report how concerned the US Navy was about sensitive information being leaked to German submarine commanders: "Some weight began to be accorded [...] to the possibility that information as to convoy movements assistance in refuelling of submarines might be traced to criminal elements of Italian or German origin on the waterfront."

Enemy sabotage of the USS Lafayette was widely suspected

The navy wanted to place undercover agents in factories, hotels and bars, and they needed to bring the fleets of fishing boats that worked the waters of the Eastern Sea Frontier onside, too. They needed a network of informants to keep a step ahead of the Nazis but the longshoremen, stevodores, fishermen and other blue-collar workers were suspicious people who would not talk easily to strangers – and certainly not to official-looking government types. So Commander Haffenden had to try a different tack; he'd talk to the real power in the docks – the mafia.

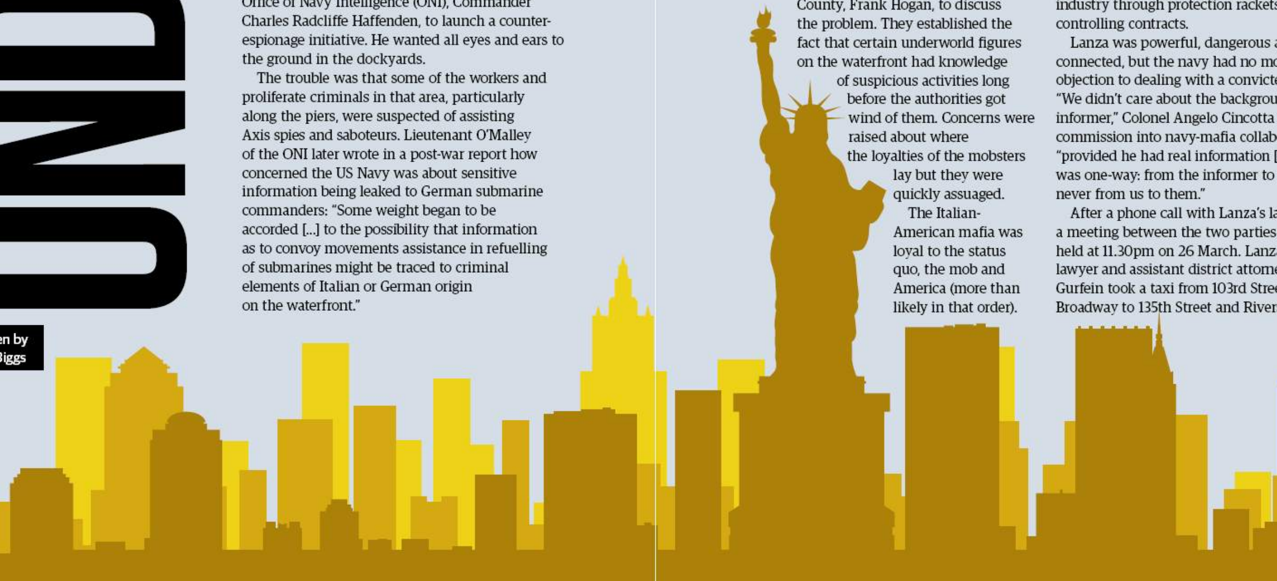
A flurry of clandestine meetings followed as 'Operation Underworld' was formulated. On 7 March 1942, senior ONI figures had their first meeting with the district attorney of New York County, Frank Hogan, to discuss the problem. They established the fact that certain underworld figures on the waterfront had knowledge of suspicious activities long before the authorities got wind of them. Concerns were raised about where the loyalties of the mobsters lay but they were quickly assuaged.

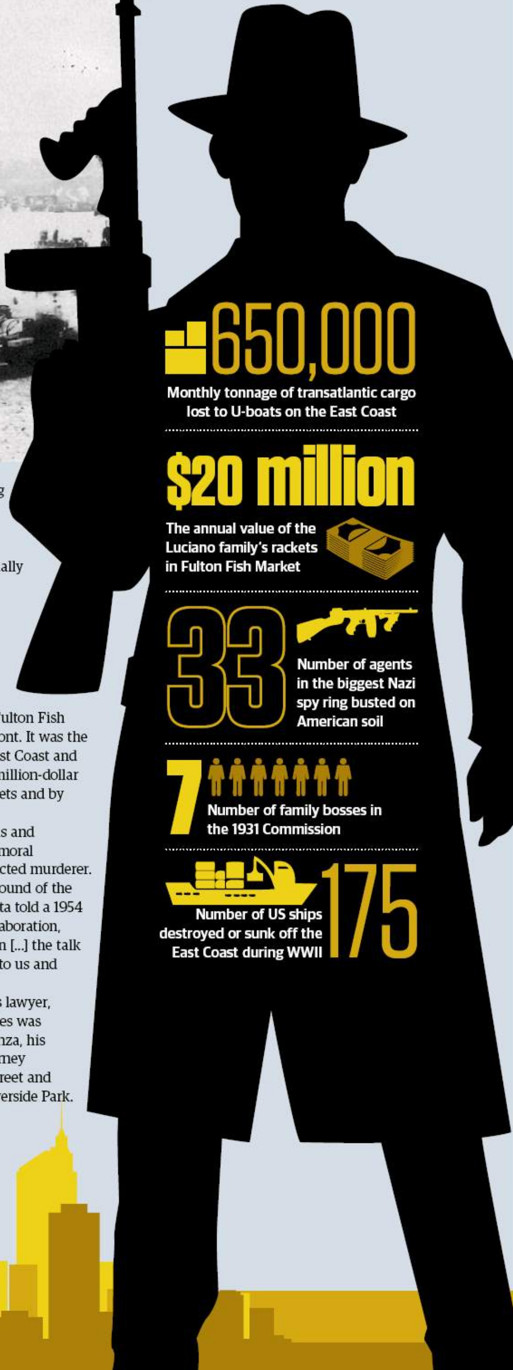
The Italian-American mafia was loyal to the status quo, the mob and America (more than likely in that order). There was no profit in supporting a fascist regime thousands of miles away just because it happened to be in control of the Old Country. A name of a potentially useful contact came up: Joseph 'Socks' Lanza.

Lanza was a capo in the Luciano crime family (later Genovese), a well-known racketeer and union boss who had founded Local 359, the labour union for the workers at Fulton Fish Market on the East River waterfront. It was the biggest fish wholesaler on the East Coast and he took a tidy slice of this multimillion-dollar industry through protection rackets and by controlling contracts.

Lanza was powerful, dangerous and connected, but the navy had no moral objection to dealing with a convicted murderer. "We didn't care about the background of the informer," Colonel Angelo Cincotta told a 1954 commission into navy-mafia collaboration, "provided he had real information [...] the talk was one-way: from the informer to us and never from us to them."

After a phone call with Lanza's lawyer, a meeting between the two parties was held at 11.30pm on 26 March. Lanza, his lawyer and assistant district attorney Gurfein took a taxi from 103rd Street and Broadway to 135th Street and Riverside Park.





650,000
Monthly tonnage of transatlantic cargo lost to U-boats on the East Coast

$20 million
The annual value of the Luciano family's rackets in Fulton Fish Market

33
Number of agents in the biggest Nazi spy ring busted on American soil

7
Number of family bosses in the 1931 Commission

175
Number of US ships destroyed or sunk off the East Coast during WWII

FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

The real power of the US docklands was in the hands of a few shady characters

Meyer Lansky

4 July 1902 – 15 January 1983

Mob associate

A lifelong partner of Luciano and highly regarded mob associate, Lansky was a Jewish mobster who would later become a financier for the Five Families – their 'accountant', if you like. He helped to convince Luciano to lend his underworld contacts to the navy's counter-espionage efforts.

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Albert Anastasia

26 September 1902 –
26 September 1957

Gambino

'Mad Hatter' Anastasia was a feared mob hit man with a hair-trigger temper who would later become boss of the Gambino crime family. He controlled the Brooklyn waterfront and later sought to claim responsibility for the sabotage of USS Lafayette, although it is very unlikely that he was the culprit.

Charles Luciano

24 November 1897 –
26 January 1962

Genovese

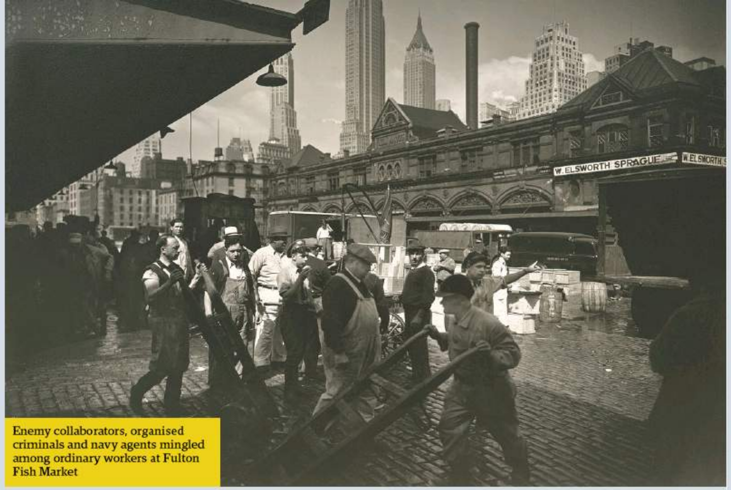
'Lucky' Luciano is probably one of the most influential mob bosses in history, responsible for reorganising Italian-American Mafia into what we recognise today. He pulled strings from inside a prison cell to allow the US Navy to stay one step ahead of Nazi saboteurs and spies.

Joseph Lanza

1904 – 11 October 1968

Genovese

'Socks' Lanza controlled Fulton Fish Market in Lower Manhattan and was heavily involved in labour unions, which put him in direct contact with workers in and around New York City's docklands. He helped leverage Luciano's criminal network to assist US Navy intelligence.



Enemy collaborators, organised criminals and navy agents mingled among ordinary workers at Fulton Fish Market

> "Lanza's criminal network extended across the waterfront out to the captains of fishing fleets at sea"

Here, Lanza and Gurfein talked for around an hour on a park bench, a location where Lanza felt he wouldn't be seen and suspected as an informant for the DA's office.

The meeting was a success – Lanza could help and was willing to. He later passed Commander Haffenden some telephone numbers on which he could be easily reached and Lanza was given a code number and a visitor's pass to Haffenden's office, where he met with the commander every week or so.

The Cosa Nostra capo was certainly a useful man for the navy to have in their back pocket. Lanza's criminal network extended across the waterfront out to the captains of fishing fleets at sea, all of whom were utilised as submarine lookouts, calling in codes with their ship-to-shore telephones whenever suspicious activity was spotted. Agents were seamlessly placed in trucking jobs around the ports and on fishing boats, using an introduction from a friendly face and fishworkers' union books obtained by Lanza. Lanza himself brought useful intelligence from Fulton Fish Market to his weekly meeting with Commander Haffenden.

However, the navy needed to do more than merely stop enemy spies from disrupting the war effort on their own shores – they needed the dirt on Italy: verbal descriptions of places with strategic significance, photos of shorelines to help identify potential beachheads. The ONI needed to speak to those who were born in Italy and might still have family there but this was where Lanza apparently hit a wall.

Lanza controlled Fulton Fish Market. Beyond that, he needed help from others in the various mafia families of New York, but his indictment had led many of those in his criminal network to believe that in dealing with the ONI he was acting as an informant and so they wouldn't talk. There was a man, however, whose word could open doors for the navy.

Charles 'Lucky' Luciano, chairman of the Commission – the American mafia's governing body – and head of the Luciano crime family, held sway over the entire New York waterfront. Six years into a 30-year sentence upstate in Clinton Correctional Facility for running a prostitution ring, it's a testament to his power that, even behind bars, the only impediment to him helping the authorities was that he was a long drive from the city.

Another flurry of meetings occurred: Gurefin spoke with Moses Polakoff, Luciano's lawyer at his 1936 trial. He had no contact with Luciano (and seemed to be satisfied with that) but knew a lifelong associate of the mob boss who was powerful mafia man – Meyer Lansky. Gurefin, Lansky and Polakoff then had a breakfast meeting at Longchamps restaurant, Manhattan. Lansky agreed to help and to travel with Polakoff to meet with Luciano, as long as Luciano was moved to a prison closer to the city. Arguably, this move to Great Meadow Correctional Facility in Comstock also made it easier for Luciano to conduct his business in New York but it certainly cut down on Polakoff's commute.

HITLER THE AXIS WAR MONSTER

An anti-Nazi parade on New York's Fifth Avenue in 1942

Amid great secrecy, Polakoff and Lansky met with Luciano. Prison Warden Morhous was told not to take fingerprints or record their visits in the book and that they must have complete privacy. The mob boss was apparently surprised by their visit, exclaiming, "What the hell are you fellows doing here?" when Lansky and Polakoff entered the holding cell. The situation was explained to him and Luciano agreed to help. Lanza would meet with Luciano, who would tell him who to talk to and what to do, while Lansky would speak on Luciano's behalf to mafiosos outside of Lanza's sphere of influence. Both men knew that if Lansky said he was acting in Luciano's stead, he wouldn't be questioned.

Polakoff visited Luciano 15 times, sometimes with other members or associates of the mafia, including Jonny 'Cockeye' Dunn, Willie McCabe and Jimmy 'Blue Eyes' Alo. Every time, Polakoff would sit in one corner of the room reading a newspaper while the men chatted. On several occasions, more than one crook was brought into the fray – on 25 August 1942, a party of seven met with Luciano in prison. These meetings continued right up until of Victory over Japan Day in 1945.

The value of Luciano's and his associates' assistance is hard to quantify. The fact that the US Navy relied on help from New York's mobsters was a source of some awkwardness immediately after the war, especially when Luciano's sentence was commuted in 1946 – only 10 years into a 30-50 year stretch.

While Lucky's release was conditional on him being deported to Italy, it caused a scandal. An inquiry was set up and William Herlands, New York's commissioner of investigation, wrote a 100-page report on the ONI's interactions with the crime families of New York during World War II.

Early on, it was made clear to these criminals that there would be "no compensation" for their assistance; it was "their duty" to assist the US in their war effort. While helping the navy didn't cost them anything, the mafia wasn't known for giving something away for free. So what was in it for Luciano and company?

While Luciano was assured to get out of prison sooner, it's likely the others knew 'doing their bit' would put them in a more favourable light if (or, more realistically, when) they ran into any trouble with the law in the future. It's also hard to believe Luciano didn't make the most of his unrestricted access to his crime family to discuss illicit business during their meetings, too. The US defeat of Mussolini was also in the gangsters' interests – the leader had cracked down hard on the mafia in Sicily. It was a no-lose situation for the mob.

But was Operation Underworld a success for the US Navy? The ONI was certainly a more effective at counter-espionage than it had been. With the mafia on board, they had eyes everywhere in New York City and particularly in the docklands. More arrests were made, more enemy submarines spotted and the Italian community of New York was able to provide invaluable information on the coastlines of their motherland. Finally, for the duration of the war, the mafia-controlled labour unions didn't go on strike, so trade and the vital infrastructure of war was unobstructed.

William Herlands put it aptly in the conclusion of his report. The governor who had commuted Luciano's sentence had been "conservative" in his statement of the mob boss's contribution to the war effort – that "there can be no question about the value" of Operation Underworld.

Charles Luicano relaxing in Sicily, after being released early from prison - but expelled from the US

HITLER'S DOOMED SABOTAGE MISSION

When Nazi agents tried to infiltrate the US, it didn't go entirely to plan

Operation Pastorius was sound in principle: the Nazis would contact and recruit eight German citizens living in the US. They would arm them, give them explosives, $175,000, fake identity cards and draft deferment documents to avoid being called up for military service.

This was December 1941, just after the US had declared war on Japan, and Germany wanted a campaign of terror to demoralise civilians and hamper the US war machine.

The saboteurs were trained at the German High Command near Berlin where they were taught to handle explosives, they made efforts to improve their English and pop culture knowledge by reading American newspapers and magazines, and they developed robust fake histories that they learned by heart.

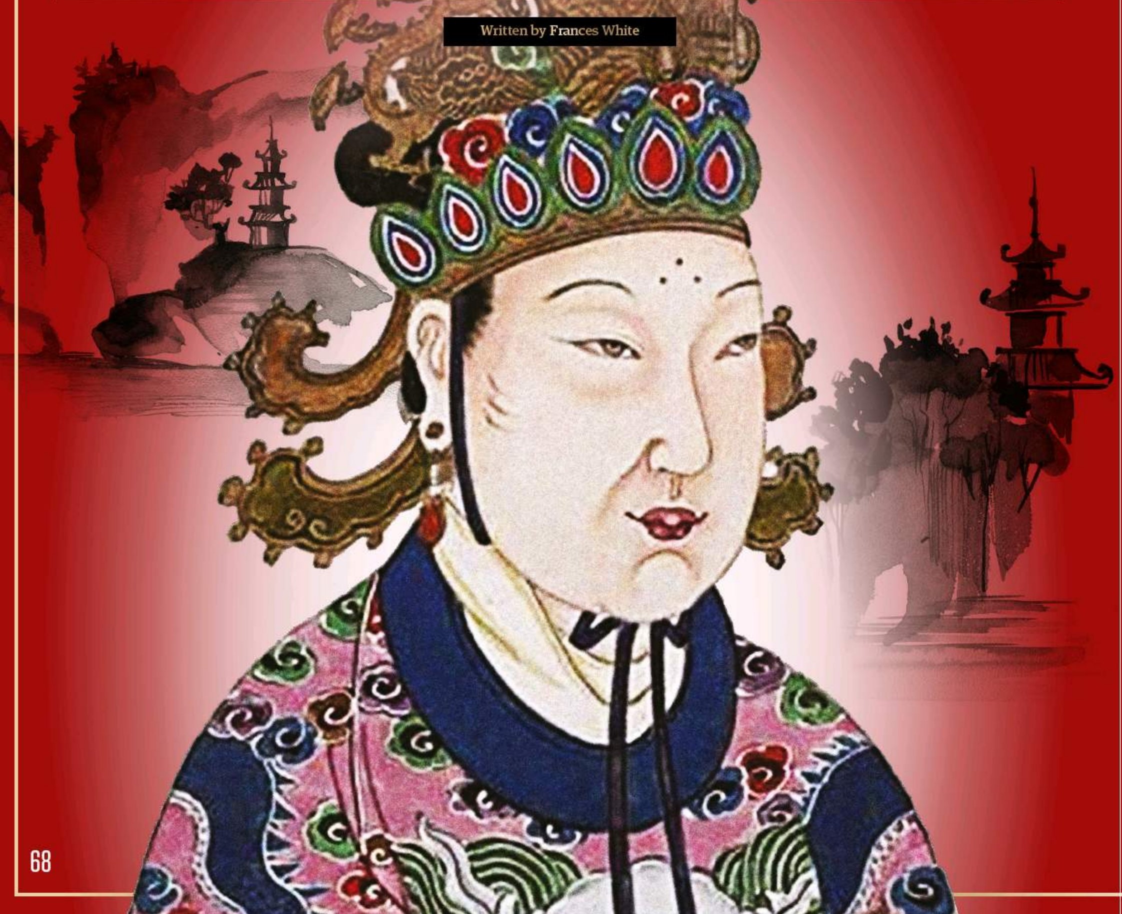
They had all the resources but it seemed none of the professionalism required for the job. George Dasch left documents that could have exposed the operation on a train. Another recruit drunkenly boasted to punters in a Parisian bar that he was a secret agent. The Nazis clearly didn't choose their agents carefully enough.

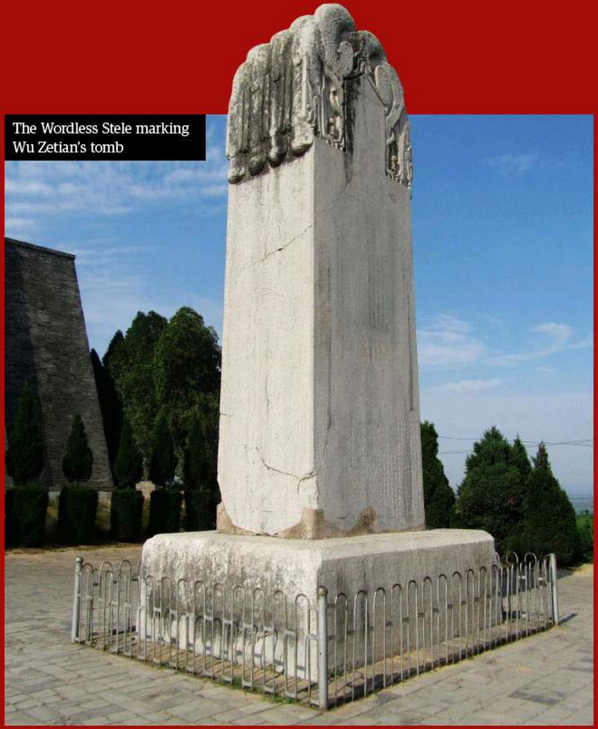
After being dropped off 185 kilometres from New York City by a U-boat, the saboteurs had a close call with the US Coastguard, who found some of their equipment buried on the beach. Dasch and one of his fellow agents decided that they hated Nazis and went to the FBI to inform them of their mission. Two weeks later, the men were rounded up, having failed to execute any of their plans. Hitler never again tried to send saboteurs into the US.

The captured German agents on trial, July 1942

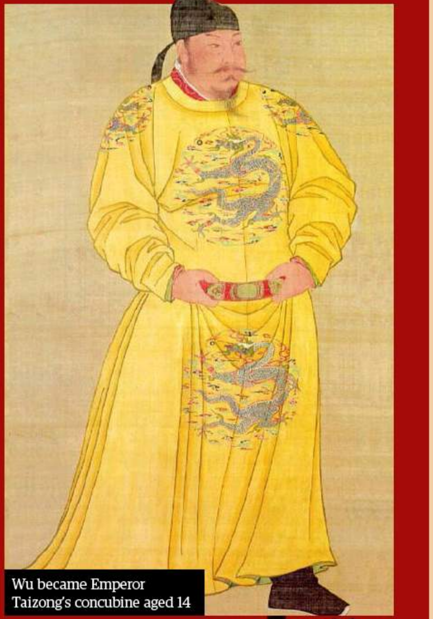
THE *Dragon* EMPRESS

Written by Frances White





The Wordless Stele marking Wu Zetian's tomb



Wu became Emperor Taizong's concubine aged 14

Peaceful reformer or scheming murderer, the true nature of the only woman to rule China in her own right is shrouded in mystery

The Guanzhong Plain in Shanxi province is China's own Valley of the Kings, scattered with 20 mausoleums to Tang dynasty rulers. However, one of the tombs at Qianling Mausoleum is quite different from the others. Normally, the huge stone slab that sits outside a tomb lists the great deeds of the dead, but this one's tablet is blank. Known as the Wordless Stele, it marks the tomb of the only woman to rule China in her own right as an empress in the country's 2,000 years of history.

On the one hand, Empress Wu Zetian's blank slate suggests she did nothing memorable. Others will tell you it hints at a life of murder, betrayals and scheming – acts not worthy of inscription. What you would never assume is that it belongs a woman who ruled over one of the most peaceful and prosperous periods of China's history, and even gave the lower orders of Chinese society their first ever voice in how they were governed.

This is because the historians who were expected to recount her great deeds upon the tablet were men who hated her. The blank stone, much like Wu herself, presents two possibilities – a woman so indescribably evil that a single good deed cannot be etched upon it, or a country so unwilling to upset the status quo that a blank stone is better than the truth that challenges it.

Wu was born in 624 to a wealthy family that had made its money in the timber business. While most young girls were instructed in what would make them a good wife, Wu's father allowed her to follow her own interests. An intelligent girl, she was actively encouraged to widen her education, to read books and learn about politics, government, writing, literature and music. As most girls did needlework, Wu was learning the skills that one would day help her rule a nation. Because of her father's support, she was encouraged to step beyond what was expected of her gender from a very early age.

Wu's quick mind, coupled with her good looks, attracted the attention of the Emperor Taizong of Tang and she was selected to become one of his concubines. Aged just 14 years old, Wu was spirited away to the ruler's court, a palace of schemes, plots and power plays, likely a terrifying place for a young girl to be thrust into – but she was a quick learner.

Sources vary as to the emperor's feelings towards Wu, with some claiming she became a quick favourite and others the opposite. What we do know is that she was hardly a timid, kneeling, submissive mistress because while still assigned to the aging emperor, she began an affair with his son, Prince Li Zhi.

Li Zhi's feelings for Wu are in no debate – he was completely in love with her. When Taizong died, all of his concubines, as tradition dictated, had their heads shaved and were sent to live out the rest of their days at a Buddhist convent. When Li Zhi became emperor in 649, taking the name of Gaozong, he broke with tradition and demanded Wu to be returned to court as his own concubine. Surprisingly, Gaozong's wife, Empress Wang, had actually encouraged the return. Wang had hoped that Wu might divert attention from one of the ruler's other concubines, Xiao Shufei. Wang was right, but she would rue the day.

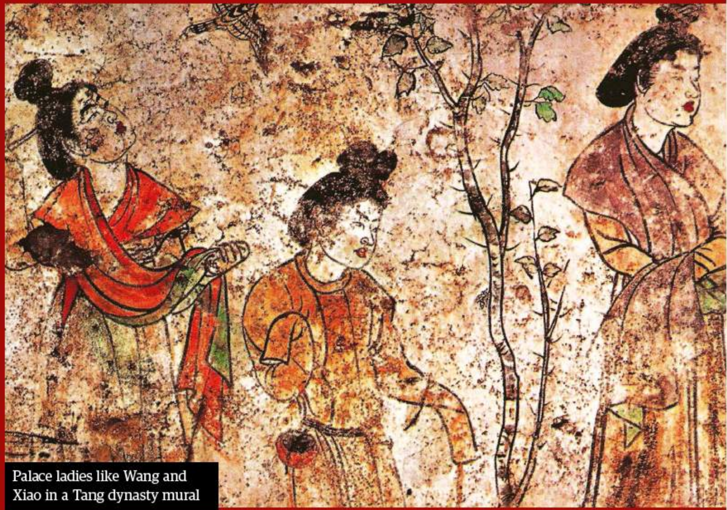
> "Wu was learning the skills that would one day help her rule a nation"

Wu had two sons with Gaozong but that fact alone would not have worried Wang and Xiao. The emperor had already chosen a successor – his chancellor was his wife's uncle, and he had named his son, Li Zhong, as his current heir. However, Wu had another baby in 654, a girl, who was found dead in her crib just days after being born.

This is where the historical narratives split. For Wu, the culprit was clear – Wang had been jealous of her husband's affections for her and of her ability to bear him children for some time, and she had taken it out on her newborn baby. Wang was the last person seen in the room and had no alibi. Wu claimed that Wang had strangled her child and was also practicing witchcraft, along with Xiao. The charges were taken very seriously and the emperor sided with Wu over his wife. Wang and Xiao were exiled from the palace, Li Zhong stripped of his position as heir and Wu given the role of first wife.

Wu's account of events is not impossible and there is no real reason not to believe them. However, they did conveniently make her the most powerful woman in China and some Chinese historians view the reality as very different. It is a common belief that Wu killed her own child in order to implicate Wang and eliminate her as a rival. The idea of a mother smothering a child she had only just birthed is a horrifying one, and a tale that paints Wu as an ambitious, devilish woman willing to do anything to grasp power, but the men writing these depictions were not exactly keen to portray a female stepping above her station in the best light.

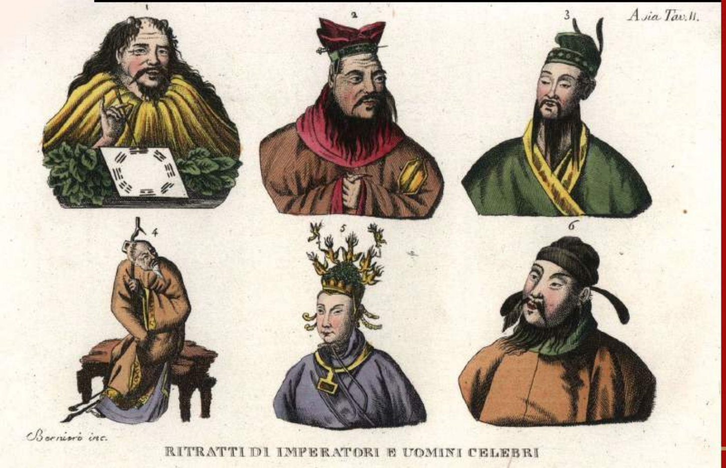
This story was the beginning of a common portrayal of Wu as a conniving, ruthless, bloodthirsty temptress, but it was told by men who were convinced a woman entering a position of power would upset the balance of nature. So although the tale quickly entered Chinese folklore, the actual evidence of it being true is nonexistent – it is far more likely that neither woman was responsible for the death and that the child died of asphyxiation due to poor ventilation in the palace. Wu then exploited the situation to her advantage.



Palace ladies like Wang and Xiao in a Tang dynasty mural

Whatever the truth, Wu had found herself in the position of first wife and it was one she did not intend to give up easily. When her husband showed signs of considering the release of the two exiled women, Wu ordered their deaths. Another particularly grisly tale is that she tortured them, chopping up their limbs and putting them into wine jars, saying, "Let these two witches be drunk to their bones!" It's a claim that seems more like a line from a Disney villain than a real-life person and is very difficult to believe.

An 1843 European engraving lists Wu (5) alongside Chinese greats, including the mythical hero Fuxi (1), the philosopher Confucius (2) and the first emperor of unified China, Qin Shi Huang (3)



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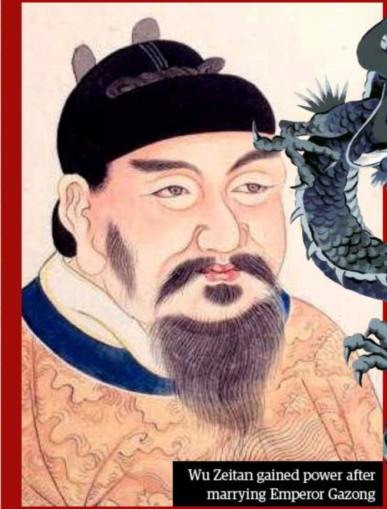
The two women did end up dead, however, and it is likely that Wu was simply ensuring the survival of herself and her sons, not at all uncommon actions for a man of the era, but viewed with scorn when carried out by a woman. She was almost certainly ambitious but this was the cutthroat Chinese court of the 7th century, where not being ambitious would see you trodden on, destitute and crushed beneath the shoes of your competitors. Wu needed ambition to survive.

Within five years of their marriage, the emperor suffered a debilitating stroke and Wu took over administrative duties of the court, effectively giving herself her husband's power. There were many who didn't approve of this and Wu knew it but rather than simply letting her enemies plot against her, Wu decided to hit back.

Over one brutal and bloody year, she set about eliminating her enemies and all possible claimants to the throne – 15 family lines were destroyed through executions, accusations of treason and forced suicides. A secret police force was created to spy on her opposition and Wu was extremely effective at taking out anyone who threatened her authority. Wu really didn't like people telling her what to do and to the male-dominated world of the Chinese court she was a terrifying concept – a woman who didn't know her place.

After her husband's death in 683, Wu's son Li Zhe was placed on the throne, taking the name Zhongzong. But when the boy refused to comply with her orders, she quickly had him and his wife banished for treason. Her next son, Emperor Ruizong, was equally as much of a disappointment. Weak and unable to rule as she saw fit, she persuaded him to abdicate and declared herself Emperor Zetian, the first female ruler of China.



Wu Zeitan gained power after marrying Emperor Gazong

Of course, Wu had been ruling for years before, but now it was official and the men of court did not like it one bit. We can see how uncomfortable they were with the concept of bowing to a female ruler when one scholar claimed that "throughout the empire… hens changed into roosters."

After her accession, an earthquake shook the land – a bad omen proving that a woman ruling as a man had upset the very balance of nature itself. When a mountain was seen to 'appear' afterwards, Wu claimed it was a sign of heavens blessing her reign but many of her ministers disagreed.

One implored her that she should lead "the quiet life of a widow" else "further disasters will befall us." He was promptly exiled to a southern swamp land and other ministers who did not favour her decided to keep their opinions quiet. Instead, their disdain found its way into the histories of her reign as opinions and fears that would eventually be accepted as truths.

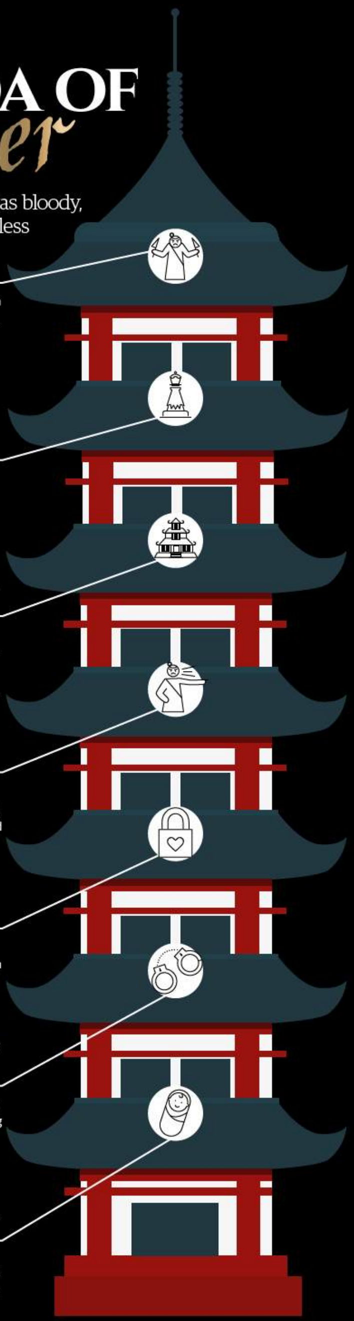
Wu didn't really care about the opinions of men – she wanted to make it very clear that her reign was the beginning of something new, and her name, Zetian, meant 'ruler of the heavens'. When she changed the name of the state from Tang to Tianzhou, meaning 'granted by heaven', it was almost as if she was mocking the men who claimed her position was unnatural for a woman by deeming it blessed by the heavens themselves.

Wu bookended the Tang dynasty by making sure that all of the royal family were imprisoned. This may seem cruel in retrospect, but she was simply acting as any man of the time would have.

> *"Rather than simply letting her enemies plot against her, Wu decided to hit back"*

PAGODA OF *Power*

Wu's rise to the top was bloody, brutal and ruthless



Reign of terror

Wu works quickly to eliminate any opposition in the court. She systematically wipes out all claimants to the throne by exile, execution and even forced suicide so that she can rule unopposed.

Seizes the throne

With no sons left, Wu claims the dragon throne for herself and becomes the first recognised female ruler of china to govern in her own name.

Second son abdicates

Wu keeps her second son and current emperor under house arrest but eventually gets tired of him, too. She forces him to abdicate the throne and he does as he's told.

Son is charged

After Taizong's death, Wu's son takes the throne but he is unruly with a scheming wife. Wu decides to cut all ties and has him charged with treason and banished.

Weds the emperor

Now with no rivals to oppose her for the emperor's affections, Wu rises to the position of first wife and empress of China with her sons as heirs.

Lady Wang accused

Wu ensures the emperor's wife is the prime suspect for the murder of her daughter. Wang is divorced and exiled, along with Taizong's first concubine, Xiao.

Murder of daughter

Wu's newborn daughter is found dead in her crib. In many accounts it is Wu who has killed her, strangled to death with her own hands to frame her rivals.

ASK THE Expert

Wu biographer Dr Jonathan Clements weighs in on the legacy of China's infamous empress

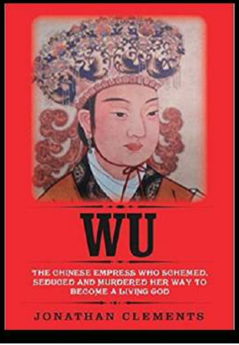
Q: **How reliable do you believe the historical accounts of Wu Zetian's reign to be?**

A: The accounts of Wu's reign are full of lies and spin from her, her enemies and her descendants. We actually have lots of information about the period but all of it is suspect in some way, so it's essential to compare varying sources to get a sense of what they are circling around.

Q: **To what extent do you believe that her reign improved or harmed China's perception and treatment of women in the 7th century and beyond?**

A: There's a huge deal of hypocrisy. Wu gets blamed for dragging the dynasty down but she presided over its peak of prosperity, promoted a meritocracy and pushed for greater recognition of women's contribution to society. Women in Chinese history were traditionally neither seen nor heard – it was considered rude to address a lady by her name, so they are often anonymous when they do show up. Earlier historians tend to use stories of women in power as cautionary tales to remind everybody what a bad idea it is supposed to be.

Beneath the surface, there's a subtly racist tinge as well. The periods in Chinese history when women had political influence tended to be those where 'barbarians' were in charge, like the Mongols or the Jurchen, so often you're seeing a backlash against foreigners and not women in general. In modern times, however, Wu has become something of an icon. A lot of modern Chinese women fixate on the intrigues and the rags-to-riches storyline. Hopefully not on all the murders.

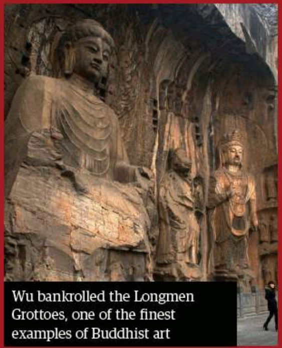


WU

THE CHINESE EMPRESS WHO SCHEMED, SEDUCED AND MURDERED HER WAY TO BECOME A LIVING GOD

JONATHAN CLEMENTS

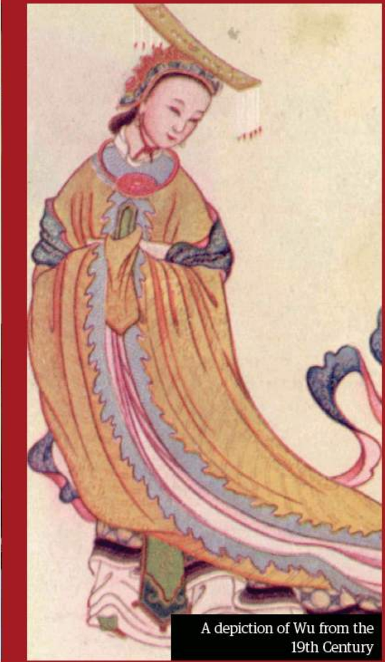
Dr Jonathan Clements is the author of Wu: The Chinese Empress who Schemed, Seduced and Murdered Her Way to Become a Living God. *He is currently a visiting professor at Xi'an Jiaotong University, China.*



Wu bankrolled the Longmen Grottoes, one of the finest examples of Buddhist art

A stele written with the modified Chinese characters Wu introduced

Wu briefly claimed to be the bodhisattva Maitreya in order to win supporters, inspiring statues like this



A depiction of Wu from the 19th Century

大清國當今慈禧端佑康頤昭豫莊誠壽恭欽獻崇熙聖母皇太后

Other women, like Empress Cixi (pictured), have sat on the Dragon Throne, but only Wu ruled in her own right

She ensured her grip on the throne would go unchallenged, and this was even more pertinent given that she knew there was a bull's-eye on her back. Wu's time had come and she did not intend to lose it easily.

One of her most brazen actions was to create new characters for the Chinese writing system. Intended to replace 10 to 30 of the older ones, this was Wu's way to change not only how China was operating, but the way in which people thought and wrote. It was no mere grasp for power – Wu wanted to change everything about the country, even the words spoken by her people. This, combined with the horrors she had wrought at court, would lead one to assume she was widely despised but the majority of lay-people actually adored her. Wu had shaken things up.

Her spying at court had rooted out institutional corruption and she also opened up the civil examinations to a wider group of people so that more variety was present in local and regional governments. She also created petition boxes, which allowed people to disclose their issues and grievances against court officials. Although she did use these complaints to gain information against rebellious subjects, Wu used the comments to enact reforms that she knew her people wanted – an act that led many of her subjects to believe that they were finally being listened to after being silenced for centuries.

The public education system was also revised, with new teachers hired and an overhaul of teaching methods and the curriculum. Agricultural production was almost entirely rebuilt with officials who produced the most crops and taxed their people the least being rewarded. These changes were highly successful and agricultural production reached an all-time high.

The military began to be filled with competent soldiers instead of those with family ties and this paid off in the wars in Korea. Wu's reforms helped create a capable and deadly military force that had belief in its commanders. Her military systems were so admired and produced such good results that they were never challenged. China's borders were more secure than ever and Wu's spy network worked hard to squash any sniff of rebellion before it started. Thanks to her solid leadership, she ruled over a prosperous and stable country and her reign was one of the most peaceful that China had ever seen.

However, a lifetime of plotting and dodging her enemies' blades had made the empress paranoid. Historians would later claim that she was haunted by the corpses of Wang and Xiao, their bloody curses echoing in the dark. But Wu herself was distracted by a different kind of visitor entirely: handsome young men.

Far into her 60s and beyond, there is evidence that Wu did indeed take many young, handsome men as her lovers. Her old age and the youth of their lovers caused scandal but, of course, this type of thing had been going on for centuries – it was unacceptable because of her gender. Two lovers in particular, the Zhang brothers, irritated the court. Flamboyant and possibly gay, they held raucous parties with drugs. By 705, the court officials had enough and, with Wu in her 80s, they finally found themselves daring enough to go against her – the Zhang brothers were executed.

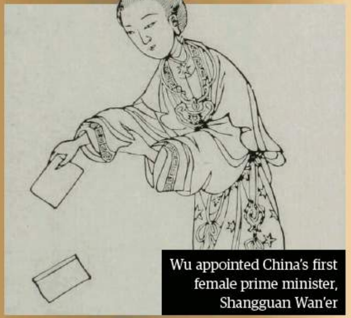
WU'S *Blazing* TRAIL

It is not unusual for women who have risen to the highest stations to go against their gender. Many female leaders throughout history have even felt obliged to deny it, such as Elizabeth I with her "heart and stomach of a king". However, Wu decided to use their newfound power not to praise the strength of men but instead elevate the position of women.

She instructed her scholars to write biographies of famous and accomplished women and led a group of women to perform traditionally male rituals at Mount Tai. Most notably, she promoted women to roles of influence within government, appointing the first female Chinese prime minister, Shangguan Wan'er.

Inspired by their strong, female leader, female poets and painters flourished. Many common women, who had been told their path was already set, began to question this and pursued careers that were previously closed to them. China benefited from this, establishing a vibrant culture of diversity.

Unfortunately, this would not last forever. When Wu died and the criticisms began, a dark mark was placed upon the name of women as rulers, or even people of influence, and 1,200 females were excluded from the public world and foot binding returned. It was safer, China decided, that women be quiet and look pretty.



Wu appointed China's first female prime minister, Shangguan Wan'er

Wu has been the subject of a Chinese TV series and stage show in recent years

Wu Zeitan rebuilt Gaozong's Great Wild Goose Pagoda, adding five extra stories in 704

A younger Wu would have avenged the brothers three-fold to reassert her authority. But Wu was growing increasingly frail. Quite clearly losing her grip on the court, Wu had no choice but to abdicate in favour of her son Ruizong, who had been biding his time in exile. While she retired to a life of lavish luxury, this was the end for Wu. She died that same year, much to the chagrin of her enemies, peacefully in bed.

Generations of scholars have argued over Wu, with some claiming she was a ruthless villain, stopping at nothing to cut down her enemies, and others believing her to be far more sympathetic. The issue surrounds the sources, which were almost certainly biased against her, and it's a problem that has emerged throughout the reigns of countless female leaders in history like that of Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, when no one wished to record the rule of a woman, hoping instead that she would be erased from history.

However, today Wu is finally being recognised as one of China's greatest rulers. Although stories of her villainy, baby killing and mutilations are still difficult to shake – and may never truly be resolved – what we can rely on are facts.

Under Wu, China enjoyed a period of stability and affluence that it had never seen before. Her reforms were not removed after her death but kept in place, laying the foundations for China to become one of the most prosperous countries in the world – and that alone is certainly worth carving in stone.

> "Today Wu is finally being recognised as one of China's greatest rulers"

Spying FOR THE Empress

Inside Wu's web of intrigue

Petition boxes

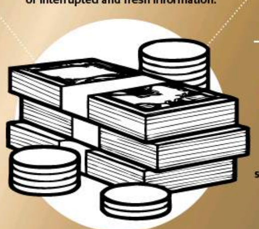
Masquerading as a place for commoners and court officials alike to voice their suggestions, these petition boxes were actually a way to entrap those who plotted against Wu. Her spies and secret police would use it to name those they suspected as scheming and she quickly had the people named eliminated.

All expenses paid

Being a spy was risky business and Wu had to make it worth their while. The empress was so reliant on her information network that she established a policy that spies would be paid to travel by public transportation in order to report back to the court, giving her a steady flow of interrupted and fresh information.

Rewards

Ratting out and spying on people was nasty business, often putting the secret police in danger themselves. Asking people to spy simply out of loyalty was not going to work, so instead Wu made sure to reward those who foiled plots handsomely. This lust for rewards actually prompted many of her spies to implicate as many people as they could get away with, and one of her police tried to implicate Wu's own sons and family members – a step too far that ended in his execution.



Accusation manual

Two of Wu's secret police apparently penned a guide entitled the *Classic of Accusation*, which served as a manual for their subordinates, teaching them how to accuse people of crimes and manufacture details that made plots seem likely. They were also said to create unique and horrific ways of torture in order to 'persuade' their targets to confess or give up crucial information.

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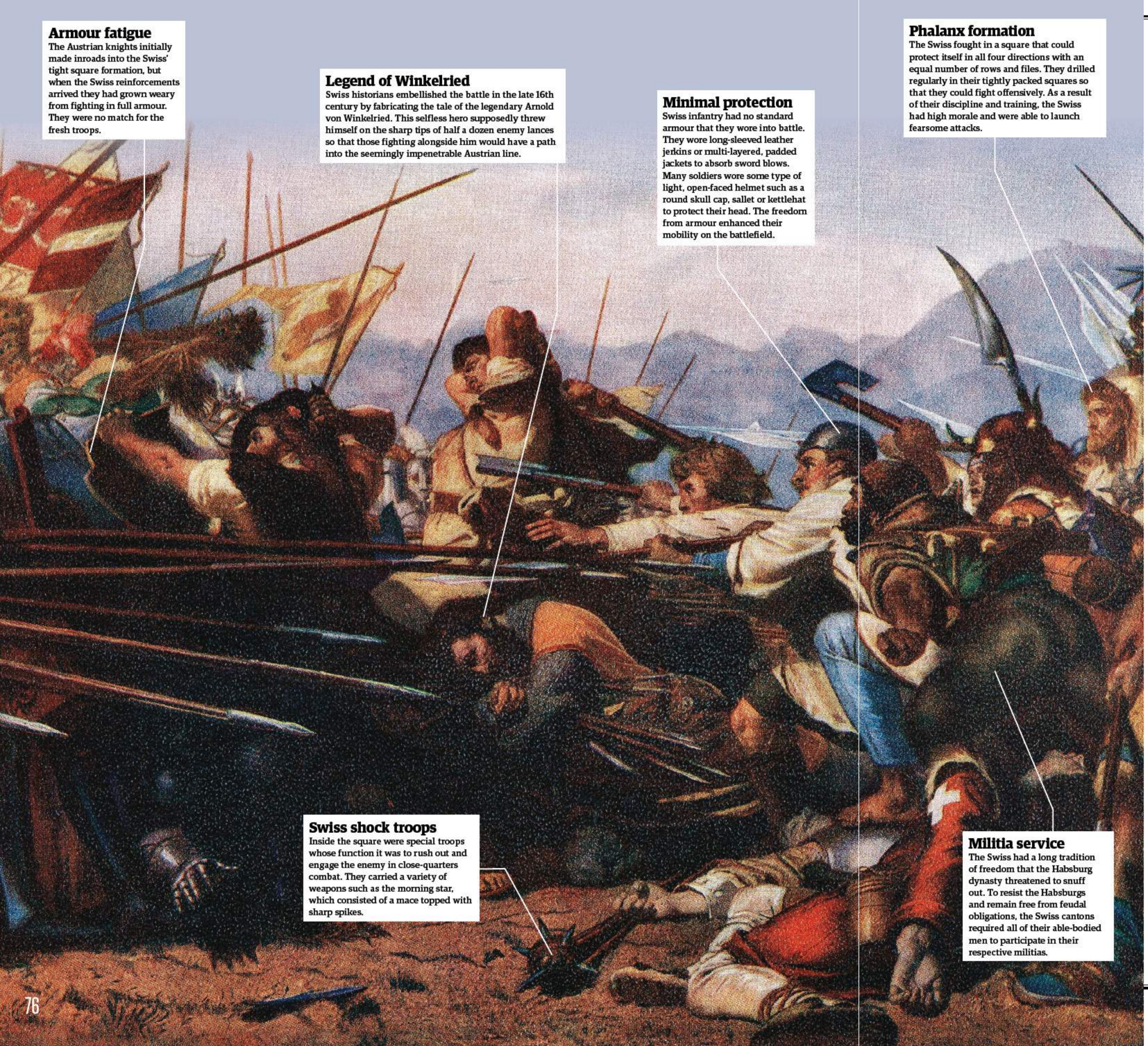


Armour fatigue
The Austrian knights initially made inroads into the Swiss' tight square formation, but when the Swiss reinforcements arrived they had grown weary from fighting in full armour. They were no match for the fresh troops.

Legend of Winkelried
Swiss historians embellished the battle in the late 16th century by fabricating the tale of the legendary Arnold von Winkelried. This selfless hero supposedly threw himself on the sharp tips of half a dozen enemy lances so that those fighting alongside him would have a path into the seemingly impenetrable Austrian line.

Minimal protection
Swiss infantry had no standard armour that they wore into battle. They wore long-sleeved leather jerkins or multi-layered, padded jackets to absorb sword blows. Many soldiers wore some type of light, open-faced helmet such as a round skull cap, sallet or kettlehat to protect their head. The freedom from armour enhanced their mobility on the battlefield.

Phalanx formation
The Swiss fought in a square that could protect itself in all four directions with an equal number of rows and files. They drilled regularly in their tightly packed squares so that they could fight offensively. As a result of their discipline and training, the Swiss had high morale and were able to launch fearsome attacks.

Swiss shock troops
Inside the square were special troops whose function it was to rush out and engage the enemy in close-quarters combat. They carried a variety of weapons such as the morning star, which consisted of a mace topped with sharp spikes.

Militia service
The Swiss had a long tradition of freedom that the Habsburg dynasty threatened to snuff out. To resist the Habsburgs and remain free from feudal obligations, the Swiss cantons required all of their able-bodied men to participate in their respective militias.

GREATEST BATTLES

BATTLE OF SEMPACH

CANTON OF LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND, 9 JULY 1386

Written by William E. Welsh

While the Hundred Years' War tends to dominate 14th-century history, the Swiss struggle to be free from the grip of Austria in the 1380s was also pivotal for Europe. The Austrians, led by the mighty Habsburg dynasty, claimed lands south of the Upper Rhine extending deep into the cantons of the rugged Northern Alps. This threatened the autonomy of the Swiss, who had largely been free of feudal constraints in the Middle Ages.

Rudolf of Habsburg, the first of the dynasty to become king of Germany, substantially enhanced the fortunes of his family. In the closing years of the 13th century he not only owned lands in many of the Swiss cantons, but also gained the duchies of Austria and Styria through conquest.

Among the Swiss lands that Rudolf's descendents coveted were the three rural districts of Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden – the so-called forest cantons. But the fiercely independent people there had no interest in bowing to Rudolf's family. In the face of Habsburg aggression, they formed a defensive alliance in 1291, an event that marked the birth of what we now call the Old Swiss Confederacy.

Duke Leopold I of Austria, Rudolf's grandson, used a minor dispute over his rights to grazing lands in Schwyz to invade the region but the commoners ambushed and defeated his mounted knights at the Battle of Morgarten in 1315. Armed with halberds, the Swiss showed no mercy to their enemy, cutting down high- and lowborn alike. Because of their brutality and disregard for the rules of chivalry, the Habsburgs learned to fear and loath them.

The Old Swiss Confederacy expanded in the mid-14th century with the additions of Bern, Lucerne, Zug and Zurich. The mercantile, urban communities enhanced the Confederacy's wealth and manpower and strengthened its military forces.

Emboldened by their growing power, the confederated cantons refused to swear an oath of fealty to the Habsburgs. In 1385, Lucerne even raided towns south of the Rhine that were controlled by the dynasty, deposing Habsburg officials and destroying farms and crops. But when Lucerne seized the town of Rothenburg in December 1385, Duke Leopold III of Austria vowed revenge.

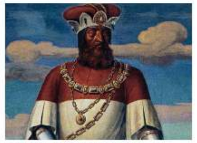
Leopold summoned vassals from Alsace, Swabia and Tyrol for a campaign against the Swiss. The Austrian army assembled in the town of Brugg in Aargau in early July 1386 and marched 72.5 kilometres to Sempach in Lucerne. Leaving the majority of his untrained infantry to hold the town, Leopold moved northeast, likely in the hope of intercepting forces reinforcing it.

The Habsburg army collided with the Lucerne contingent on 9 July 1386 outside the village of Hildisrieden. A desperate melee ensued with the Austrian knights fighting dismounted. Just when it seemed they had vanquished the Swiss army, a large body of forest canton reinforcements arrived. The well-disciplined, highly trained Swiss infantry exhibited their renowned powerful offensive action as they wheeled and struck the Austrians in the flank. Leopold was slain while leading the counterattack and his army quickly retreated.

While the modern, unified state of Switzerland we know today was still hundreds of years away, the Swiss won a decisive victory that furthered the cause of their independence. The Austrian Habsburgs were forced to admit defeat and control of territories around the Rhine would collapse in the coming years, granting Lucerne, Bern and Solothurn unchecked expansion in the region. The Swiss win also forced other states to acknowledge the Confederacy's military prowess and their presence as a growing European power.

Austrian Habsburgs

INFANTRY 2,500
CAVALRY 2,000



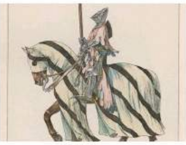
DUKE LEOPOLD III OF AUSTRIA

LEADER

The ambitious duke ruled the Habsburg family's western domains and was eager to acquire new lands.

Strengths Though he only brought a moderate-sized army to Sempach, he had a sizeable base to cherrypick recruits from.

Weaknesses He was completely unprepared for the arrival of the enemy's reinforcements.



KNIGHTS

KEY UNIT

The Austrians fought dismounted at Sempach because they had lost previous battles to the Swiss fighting on horseback.

Strengths Their plate armour gave them some protection that the Swiss lacked.

Weaknesses They could not manoeuvre as well as infantry.

LANCE

KEY WEAPON

The dismounted knights used their lances as infantry spears throughout the battle.

Strengths Their poles outreached the short-shafted Swiss halberds.

Weaknesses They were unwieldy in close combat.

01 Swiss form a square

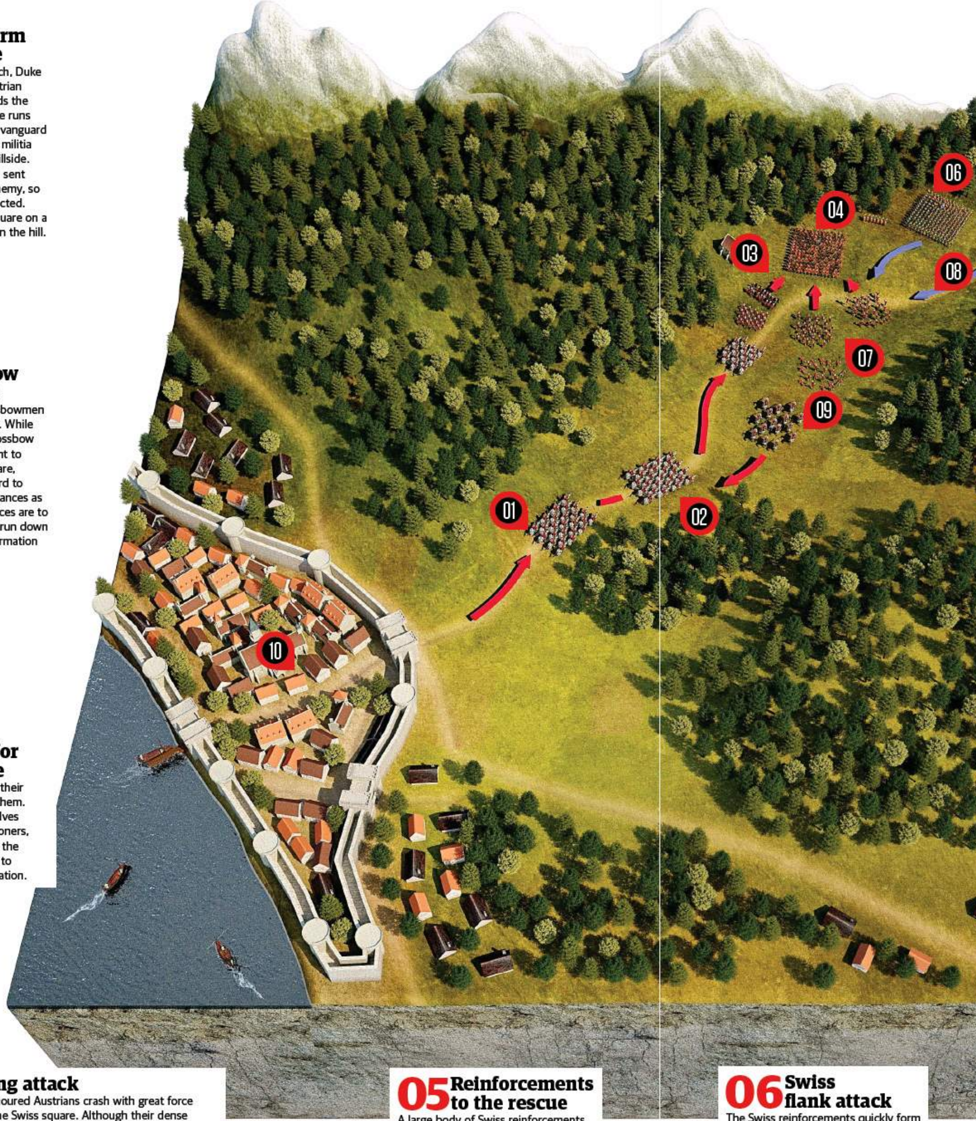
Having captured Sempach, Duke Leopold III leads his Austrian cavalry northeast towards the village of Hildisrieden. He runs headlong into the Swiss vanguard made up of the Lucerne militia descending a terraced hillside. Neither commander had sent scouts to look for the enemy, so the encounter is unexpected. The Swiss deploy in a square on a level space halfway down the hill.

02 Crossbow barrage

Leopold orders his crossbowmen to deploy as skirmishers. While they fire a barrage of crossbow bolts at the enemy meant to soften up the Swiss square, Leopold tells his vanguard to dismount and use their lances as pikes. The rest of his forces are to remain on horseback to run down the enemy once their formation has been broken.

03 Thirst for revenge

The Austrian knights let their anger get the better of them. Eager to avenge themselves against the Swiss commoners, they rush uphill towards the enemy with little regard to maintaining a tight formation.



10 Heavy casualties

In total, the Austrians lose upwards of 1,800 men – almost half of their army – while Swiss casualties are extremely light with only 200 men lost. Sempach returned to Swiss hands.

09 Fleeing Austrians

The count of Hohenzollern, who commands the rearguard, leads his mounted division away from the battle once he realises that Leopold is dead. He is joined in his flight by the pages and squires holding the horses for the knights of the vanguard and main body. The pages mount up and ride off to save themselves.

08 Leopold's death

The Austrian counterattack fails to reverse the situation on the battlefield – the momentum has irretrievably switched to the Swiss army. Leopold fights with great ferocity but he and his household troops are slain.

04 Crushing attack

The well-armoured Austrians crash with great force into the front ranks of the Swiss square. Although their dense formation imbues the Swiss troops with great confidence, it is not a substitute for the longer weapons and better armour of their opponents. In the fierce melee, the Austrians not only slay Swiss commander Petermann von Gundoldingen, but also capture the banner of Lucerne. Victory is within Leopold's grasp.

05 Reinforcements to the rescue

A large body of Swiss reinforcements from the forest cantons arrives after a forced march. Leopold had assumed that he was fighting the entire Swiss army and is stunned by the appearance of the fresh troops.

06 Swiss flank attack

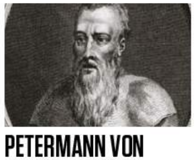
The Swiss reinforcements quickly form a square before wheeling to strike the Austrian left flank. Swiss halberdiers hack their way through the exhausted ranks of the weary Austrian vanguard.

07 Leopold leads the counterattack

Duke Leopold, who has been watching the action from his horse, orders the knights of the main body to dismount to reinforce the hard-pressed Austrian vanguard. He participates in the Austrians' disordered rush uphill as Swiss drummers beat the signal for a fresh attack against the new threat.

Swiss Confederation

INFANTRY: 3,000
CAVALRY: 0



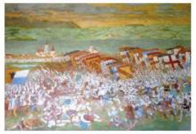
PETERMANN VON GUNDOLDINGEN

LEADER

A courageous leader who inspired his troops and fought alongside them until his death.

Strengths He thought on his feet, quickly mobilising Swiss forces to counter the Austrian invasion.

Weaknesses Failed to send scouts to track the enemy's approach.



HEAVY INFANTRY

KEY UNIT

The Swiss fought in a phalanx-like square with deep files suited for either attack or defence.

Strengths They had the training, discipline and morale to execute an effective shock attack.

Weaknesses They lacked steel caps and breastplates to adequately defend themselves against any armoured opponents.

HALBERD

KEY WEAPON

A 2.4-metre ash handle mounting a broad-headed axe that had a point to puncture armour. It also had a spike opposite the axe blade that functioned as a hook to unhorse passing riders.

Strengths A versatile weapon that was highly effective in close-quarters fighting.

Weaknesses Its short handle was outdistanced by long-shafted pikes.

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HERO OR VILLAIN?

King Edward I

The 'Hammer of the Scots' sought to exert his will over the entire British Isles by ruling with an iron fist

Written by Peter Price

Edward I stands as one of the most celebrated and vilified kings of Medieval England. Fêted at home for his military skill and governance, he his remembered as a tyrannical invader by those unfortunate enough to get in his way. A fierce warrior and capable administrator, he was also ambitious to a fault.

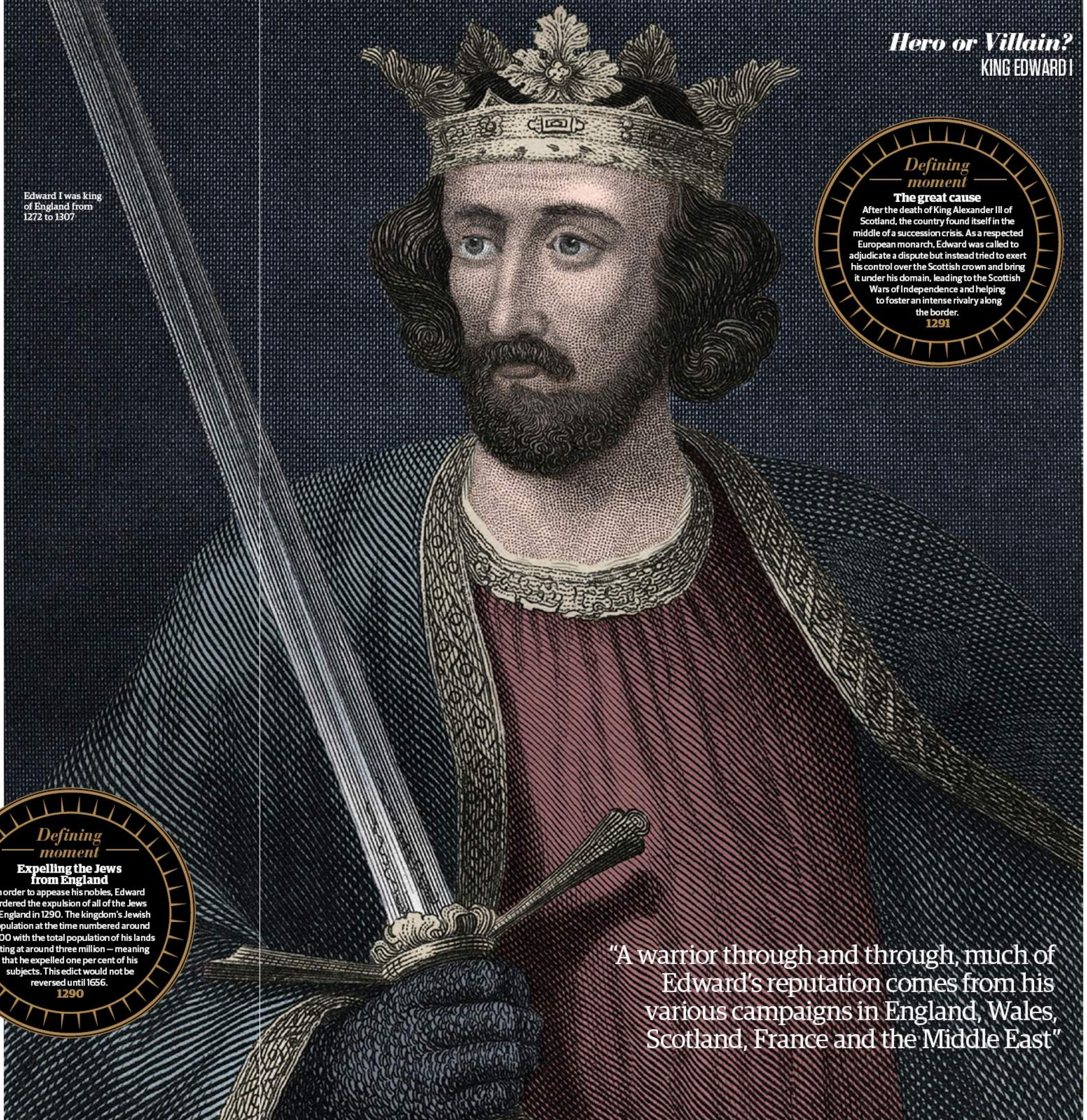
Edward's large stature gave him the nickname 'Longshanks' and he loomed over his advisors and England's neighbours in equal measure, constantly looking to expand his the borders of his realm. While this behaviour was not unusual for the period, Edward's reckless spending and heavy-handed approach to dealing with, in his eyes, unruly subjects, has seen him painted as more of a pantomime villain than heroic king.

Edward was not the first English monarch with his name but was the first of Norman descent. Before William the Conqueror came in 1066, the Anglo-Saxon rulers of England used epithets rather than numbers so although Edward the Confessor and several others predated him, Edward was known as the first once his son came to the throne.

A warrior through and through, much of Edward's reputation comes from his various campaigns in England, Wales, Scotland, France and the Middle East. Early in his life he forged his reputation as a military man in the defeat a rebellious group of barons led by Simon de Montfort. Edward then travelled to the Holy Land to fulfil his crusading vows. By the time he reached Acre, there was little zeal left in the Christian forces and after a 10-year truce was signed with the Mamluks, Edward returned home.

As king, his army was renowned throughout Europe as one of the largest and most disciplined – a force that would see him crush a fermenting rebellion and bring Wales into his sphere of influence.

His castle-building project in Wales would become one of his lasting legacies and these fortresses loomed over the countryside as a grand statement of English military might. As imposing as the castles were, they were more costly than any that were built in England and almost bankrupted the kingdom.



Edward I was king of England from 1272 to 1307

Defining moment

The great cause

After the death of King Alexander III of Scotland, the country found itself in the middle of a succession crisis. As a respected European monarch, Edward was called to adjudicate a dispute but instead tried to exert his control over the Scottish crown and bring it under his domain, leading to the Scottish Wars of Independence and helping to foster an intense rivalry along the border.

1291

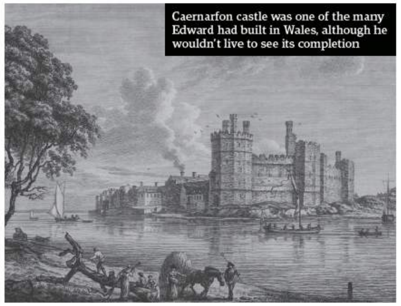
Defining moment

Expelling the Jews from England

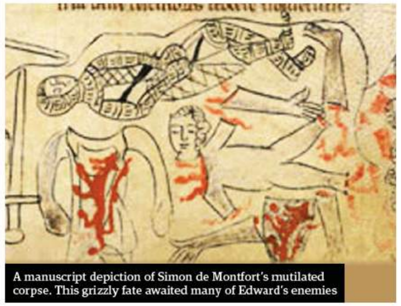
In order to appease his nobles, Edward ordered the expulsion of all of the Jews in England in 1290. The kingdom's Jewish population at the time numbered around 3,000 with the total population of his lands sitting at around three million – meaning that he expelled one per cent of his subjects. This edict would not be reversed until 1656.

1290

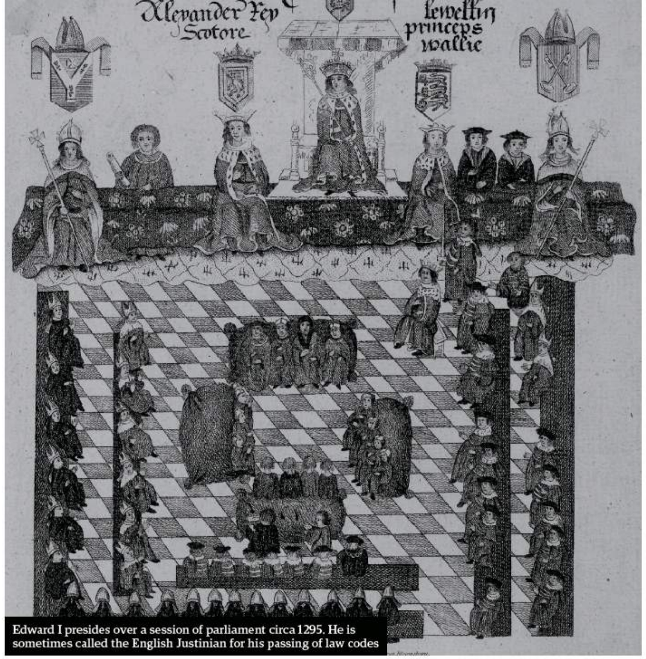
> "A warrior through and through, much of Edward's reputation comes from his various campaigns in England, Wales, Scotland, France and the Middle East"



Caernarfon castle was one of the many Edward had built in Wales, although he wouldn't live to see its completion



A manuscript depiction of Simon de Montfort's mutilated corpse. This grizzly fate awaited many of Edward's enemies



Edward I presides over a session of parliament circa 1295. He is sometimes called the English Justinian for his passing of law codes

> "Murdering his rivals was part and parcel of Edward's campaigns, although he would have seen them as traitors"

The wars in Scotland would earn him his most infamous nickname, 'The Hammer of the Scots', although this doesn't seem to have been used in his lifetime. Brought in to adjudicate a succession crisis in Scotland, Edward saw an opportunity to seize the kingdom and launched an invasion. Initially successful against William Wallace after his victory at Falkirk, his grip was loosened by Robert the Bruce, who declared himself monarch and sought to drive the invaders out. During his subjugation of the kingdom, Edward lost the Great Seal of Scotland, used to officiate laws, and many legal documents – a setback for royal governance.

Ownership of Scotland would remain Edward's driving ambition, even after death. One account of his death sees the king leaving instructions that his body was to be taken on campaign so that he would be present when Robert the Bruce was defeated. Unfortunately his dreams would come to naught as his son Edward II was defeated at the Battle of Bannockburn. It could be argued that Edward was responsible for the centuries of warfare and enmity between England and Scotland as although there had been conflict before, there had been friendship, too.

Defining moment

Nothing but castles

Arguably Edward's longest lasting legacy was the series of castles he built all over Wales. Designed to bring order to this rebellious land and show who was in control, the imposing structures formed a stone ring around the north, exerting Edward's control over the territory. Colossally expensive, some castles, like Caernarfon in North Wales, weren't completed until after Edward's death.

1276

His unscrupulous and untrustworthy nature earned him another nickname, 'Edward the Leopard', highlighting his braveness and ferocity as well as his canny ability to get himself out of sticky situations. One of his contemporaries states that "when he is cornered he promises anything you like but once he has escaped he goes back on his word. The lying by which he gains his ends he calls prudence, whatever he wants he holds to be lawful as if there are no legal bounds to his power."

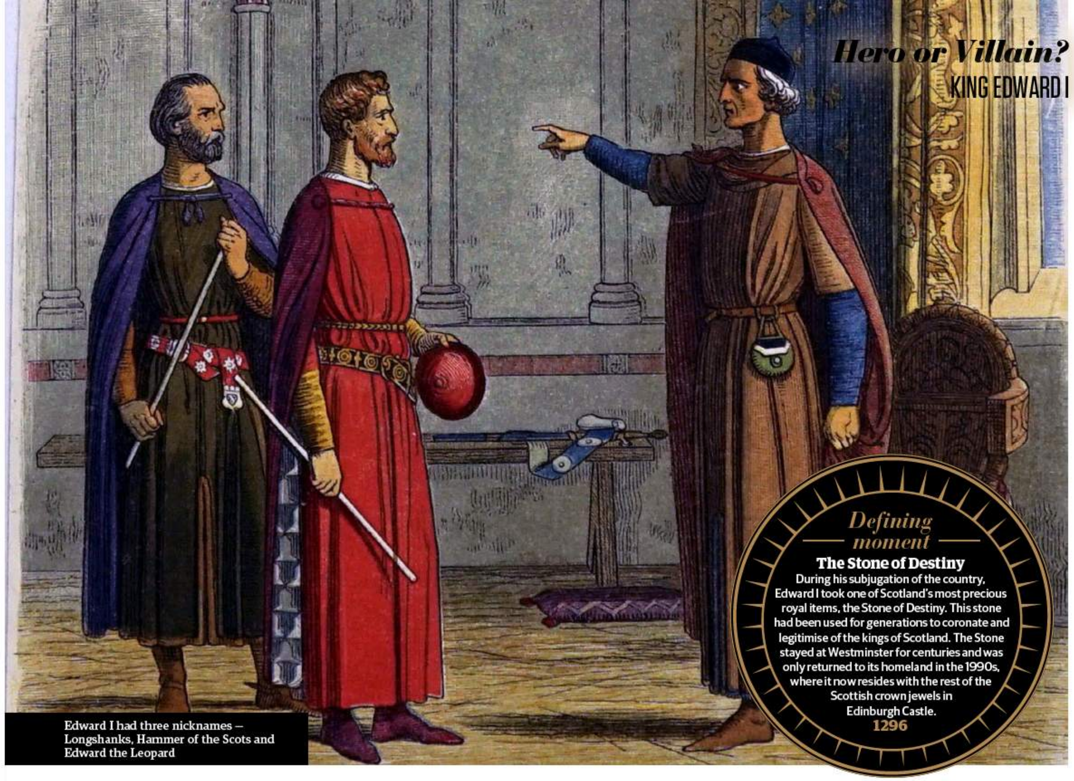
In the civil war during Henry III's reign, a young Edward initially sided with the rebels, led by Simon de Montfort, but later switched to crush the revolt. At the Battle of Evesham, Edward employed subterfuge by approaching de Montfort under his son's banner, which had been captured at Kenilworth. This rather duplicitous act won the Edward the day but ended up marring his reputation somewhat.

Edward acted less than honourably during the war, agreeing to terms only to turn on his word when it suited him. During the siege of Gloucester, he parlayed with a rebel army larger than his own that was sent to relieve the town – but once the rebels left and the danger had passed, he broke his word and took the town, imprisoning and heavily ransoming its inhabitants.

Edward was also quick to fight a psychological war as well as a physical one. King Arthur, the mythical saviour of the Britons, was still venerated in Wales and during Edward's invasion there was hope that this would be the hour of need in which he would return. To quash this hope, Edward had Arthur and Guinevere's supposed bodies reburied at Glastonbury – a statement that ensured the old legend stayed dead.

Edward also refused to let the garrison at Stirling Castle admit defeat until he had experimented with his new siege engine, the War Wolf. This giant trebuchet, possibly the largest ever built, so intimidated the defenders that they sought terms of surrender – only Edward's reply was, "You don't deserve any grace, but must surrender to my will."

Not a man known for his mercy, Edward had a reputation for cruelty and brutality and his cold-blooded treatment of his captives was well known. When Robert the Bruce's sister and the countess of Buchan were captured, they were suspended in cages above the towns of Berwick and Roxburgh – a treatment that Edward didn't consider that harsh as he had provided them with latrines.



Edward I had three nicknames – Longshanks, Hammer of the Scots and Edward the Leopard

Defining moment

The Stone of Destiny

During his subjugation of the country, Edward I took one of Scotland's most precious royal items, the Stone of Destiny. This stone had been used for generations to coronate and legitimise of the kings of Scotland. The Stone stayed at Westminster for centuries and was only returned to its homeland in the 1990s, where it now resides with the rest of the Scottish crown jewels in Edinburgh Castle.

1296

Brutally murdering his rivals was part and parcel of Edward's campaigns, although he would have seen them as traitors as they refused to bend to his will and so deserving of their fate. Rebels like Simon de Montford, Dafydd ap Gruffydd and William Wallace were all hung, drawn and quartered – a horrific execution method that involved hanging the unfortunate victim until he was almost dead, disembowelling him and finally cutting the body into pieces. These would be displayed around the kingdom as a warning to others considering defying his will.

The norm in European Medieval warfare was that noblemen were not killed but rather ransomed when captured. Edward saw an end to this by not only killing those he saw as traitors, but also organising squads of men to specifically seek out and kill nobles on the battlefield.

Edward possessed a fiery temper that could flare up at any moment. Always disturbed by his son's infatuation with Piers Gaveston, an outsider at court raised beyond his station, Edward exploded with anger at hearing that the man was being granted lands in France. "You bastard son of a bitch!" he raged, "Now you want to give lands away – you who never gained any? As the lord lives, were it not for the fear of breaking up the kingdom, you should never enjoy your inheritance."

Other outbursts included chasing a hunting companion with a drawn sword after the unfortunate man lost control of his falcon and striking a page at his daughter Margaret's wedding – although he did pay compensation to the dazed boy for this incident. Edward's temper and size would have been incredibly intimidating and during dispute with the clergy, the elderly and frail dean of St Paul's was said to have died in the king's presence his temper was so great.

Edward's temperament was also decidedly cold at times. When he heard about the death of both his father and young son, his grief was only evident towards the late Henry III. After being asked why this was, he replied, "It is easy to beget sons but when a man has lost a good father it is not in the course of nature for god to send another."

1290 saw one of Edward's most heartless acts, the Edict of Expulsion. This called for all Jews to leave his kingdom, forcing thousands to flee abroad or practise their faith in secret. Edward's motives do appear to have been primarily financial – his nobles would only agree to pay their taxes if he forced the Jews to leave. The edict was also not an isolated incident, but the culmination of 200 years of anti-Semitic persecution in England. In fact, it was welcomed by the vast majority of the country's population. However, Edward was the first king in Europe to expel Jews, setting a dangerous precedent that would haunt the continent for centuries.

Aside from his cruelty and warmongering, Edward did seem to have a vested interested in the wellbeing of his subjects. As king he issued the Hundred Rolls, a census to seek out corrupt royal officials and appoint more trustworthy men to their places. This magnanimity is tempered by the fact that his own wars and castle building programmes nearly brought his kingdom to financial ruin.

Hero or villain?

HEROISM ●●③○○○○○○○

While no doubt a brave and fearsome warrior, Edward doesn't seem to have possessed many other heroic traits.

VILLAINY ●●●●●●●⑧○○

Cruel, brutal and duplicitous, Edward would stop at nothing to get his way, although he never needlessly caused harm.

LEGACY ●●●●●●●⑧○○

Celebrated and vilified in equal measure, Edward's castles and kingship have left a lasting mark on Britain that is still visible today.

Was Edward I a hero or a villain? Get in touch and let us know what you think

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ONE'S BEST FRIEND

Written by Jessica Leggett

Edward VII poses for a photograph with his beloved dog Caesar circa 1905

From cats and dogs to orangutans and elephants, meet history's best-loved royal pets

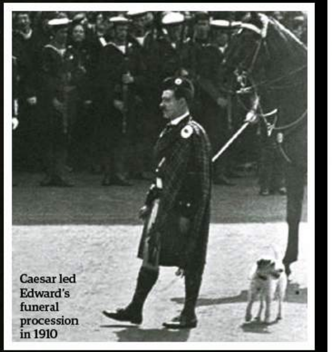
There is nothing quite like the bond between humans and their pets and rulers are no exception. Throughout history they can be seen with their loyal companions stood their side. For many of these people, their pets offered the unconditional love, affection and loyalty that they might have struggled to find elsewhere due to their positions.

Many of these stories are heartwarming and, in some cases, offer up different perspectives on historical figures. Histories of Queen Victoria are often dominated by the focus on her marriage to Prince Albert and the four decades she spent mourning his death. Yet her childhood relationship with Dash, her cherished Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, highlights the plight of a lonely, isolated young girl who only had her beloved dog for a companion. Victoria's love for pets continued for the rest of her life and she was known to own goats, parrots and even a donkey among other animals. It was the start of a long love affair with animals for the British royal family.

Of course, there are also times where the term 'pet' is used very loosely when it comes to rulers and the animals they keep. Ivan IV of Russia, commonly remembered as Ivan the Terrible, was a brutal and paranoid man. Historical accounts of his life often say that he owned "pet bears" but his relationship with them was hardly one of loyalty or affection. Ivan deliberately starved his bears so that they were ready for their next meal, which was usually a prisoner that he would have thrown into their den – hardly an example of the caring attachment that the term conjures up.

There are many examples throughout history and here are seven special relationships between pets and their powerful owners.

> **"Their pets offered the unconditional love, affection and loyalty that they might have struggled to find elsewhere"**



Caesar led Edward's funeral procession in 1910

KING EDWARD VII & CAESAR

The canine who stayed with his master until the very end

Just like his parents, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, King Edward VII adored dogs and he owned a few over the course of his life. But out of all of them, it is his relationship with Caesar, his white and brown wire fox terrier, that really tugs at the heartstrings.

Caesar lived a life of luxury with Edward, accompanying him abroad and sleeping in an easy chair by his master's bed. Caesar was assigned his own attendant, a footman, to keep him washed and clean. Although never overly concerned with other humans, he became excited whenever he saw his master. At times when he misbehaved, Edward would shake his stick at him and say, "You naughty, naughty dog." Despite this, Edward never became angry with Caesar and usually broke into a smile soon after the scolding.

When Edward passed away in 1910, Caesar became depressed, roaming Buckingham Palace in search of his master and refusing to eat until Queen Alexandra coaxed him. Knowing how much the king loved Caesar, Alexandra ordered that the dog would lead the funeral procession ahead of all of the heads of state, including King George V and Kaiser Wilhem II. Alexandra continued to care for Caesar until his own death in 1914.

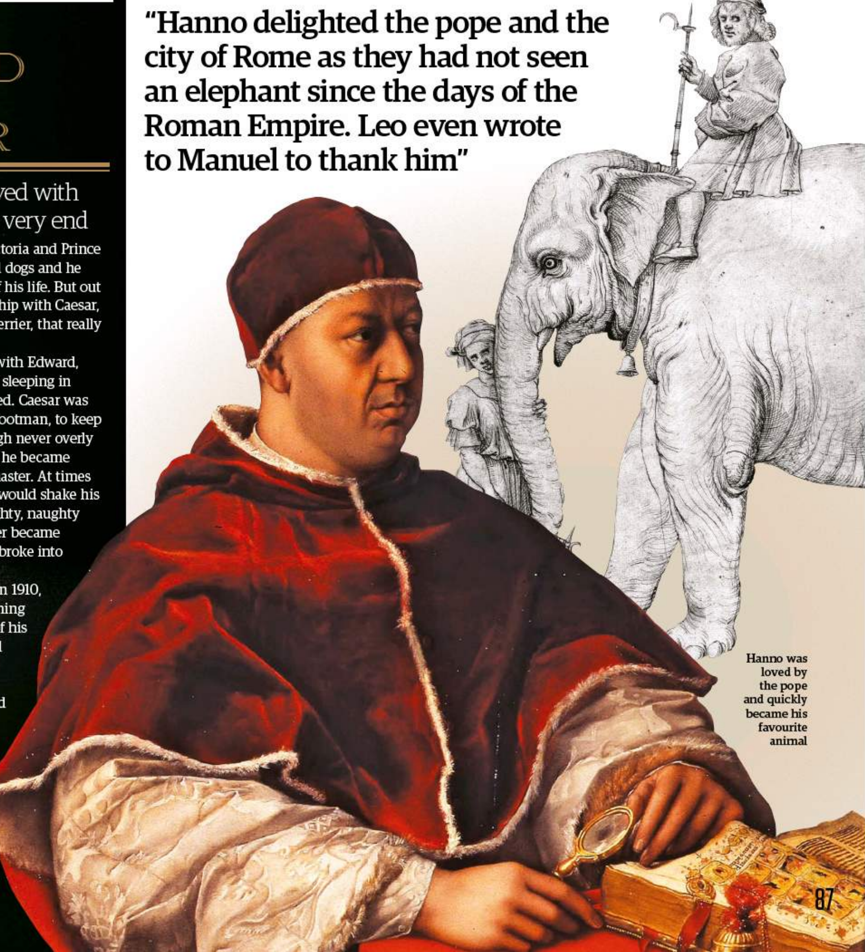
POPE LEO X & HANNO

The elephant that stole the heart of a Pope and a city

Hanno was a white Indian elephant given to Pope Leo X in 1514 as a gift from King Manuel I of Portugal. Hanno took part in the entrance procession for the king's ambassadors and he was covered "with gold brocade carrying a howdah of silver." Upon reaching the pope, he sucked water into his trunk and sprayed those who had gathered, including Leo himself! Hanno delighted the pope and the city of Rome as they had not seen an elephant since the days of the fallen empire. Leo even wrote to Manuel to thank him, stating that Hanno had "become for our people an object of extraordinary wonder."

Manuel had sent a retinue of other exotic animals, including leopards, parrots and cheetahs, to gain the pope's support for Portugal's trade expansion. However, it was Hanno who Leo, and the public, adored. When he passed away just two years later, Leo was heartbroken. He commissioned the artist Raphael to create a memorial fresco in Hanno's honour, which unfortunately no longer exists, and he personally wrote the epitaph to accompany it. Hanno was buried beneath the Vatican courtyard, with his remains discovered there in 1962.

> **"Hanno delighted the pope and the city of Rome as they had not seen an elephant since the days of the Roman Empire. Leo even wrote to Manuel to thank him"**



Hanno was loved by the pope and quickly became his favourite animal

QUEEN ELIZABETH II & SUSAN

The House of Windsor's favourite breed

In 1933, Prince Albert, Duke of York, bought a Pembroke Welsh corgi called Dookie for his daughters, Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. Dookie's arrival turned out to be the start of the Windsors' long royal love affair with the breed. When Elizabeth turned 18 in 1944, her father, now King George VI, bought her another corgi, Susan, as a birthday present. The two quickly became inseparable and Susan was even snuck into Elizabeth's carriage as she and Philip made their way to their honeymoon in 1947.

Susan lived until she was almost 15 years old, passing away in 1959. Elizabeth, now queen, wanted to commemorate her faithful companion and commissioned a memorial for her, personally sketching the design and inscription.

In total, Queen Elizabeth has owned over 30 corgis all descended from Susan – her current ones, Holly and Willow, are the 14th generation. Despite her enormous public role, she has always been incredibly shy and it has been said that her beloved dogs act as a buffer in social situations when she feels overwhelmed. Above all, they shower her with love and affection that perhaps only they can give, unaware of her royal status.

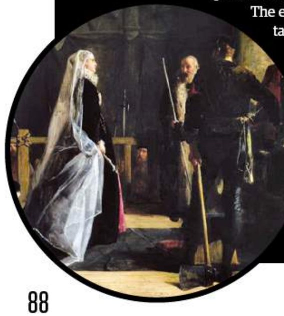
George VI unknowingly sparked his eldest daughter's life-long love of corgis

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, & GEDDON

The devoted dog and his lonely mistress

For Mary, Queen of Scots, dogs offered her the companionship that eluded her throughout her life. Sent to live at the French court aged just five, the queen sometimes felt isolated and she unfortunately experienced the same when she finally returned to Scotland after 13 years, a stranger to her native country. However, a comfort to Mary was her treasured pet dogs. Her tragic fate in 1587 is made even more poignant when you include the story of her cherished dog Geddon.

A Skye terrier, Geddon kept Mary company during the last few years of her life when she was kept imprisoned by her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. At her execution, Mary moved slowly to the scaffold and placed her head on the block, where the executioner beheaded her with two strokes of his axe. As her body was being removed, those present noticed a rustling under her clothes – under her petticoat was a terrified Geddon. The executioner tried to take him away but he escaped, running back to his mistress and curling up between her body and her severed head. The loyal little dog ended up covered in her blood and was forcibly taken away to be washed.

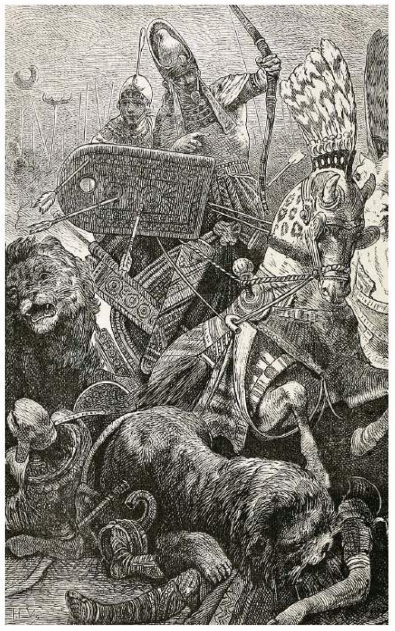


PHARAOH RAMESSES II & HIS BIG CATS

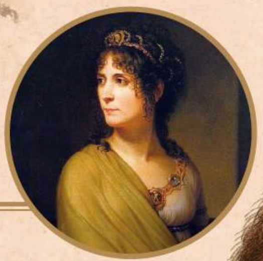
The lion's share of Egyptian royal love and affection

Ramesses II owned a variety of different exotic animals but in particular he was supposedly fond of cats. The pharaoh had a number of lions and cheetahs that roamed his palace. Of course, this is not that surprising considering how cats were seen to be sacred animals in Ancient Egyptian society. Interestingly, while the Ancient Egyptians saw lions as big cats, they actually saw cheetahs as the smaller cats!

However, Ramesses' pet lion is the one that is commonly associated with him. The lion was not just a pet to the pharaoh but a symbol of status and power. He reportedly brought his pet with him to the Battle of Kadesh against the Hittites, where the lion bravely stood by his master's side during the fight. It is this image of the pharaoh and his lion that is commonly depicted in artwork of the famous battle.



Ramesses II at the Battle of Kadesh in 1274 BCE with his faithful pet lion staying loyally by his side



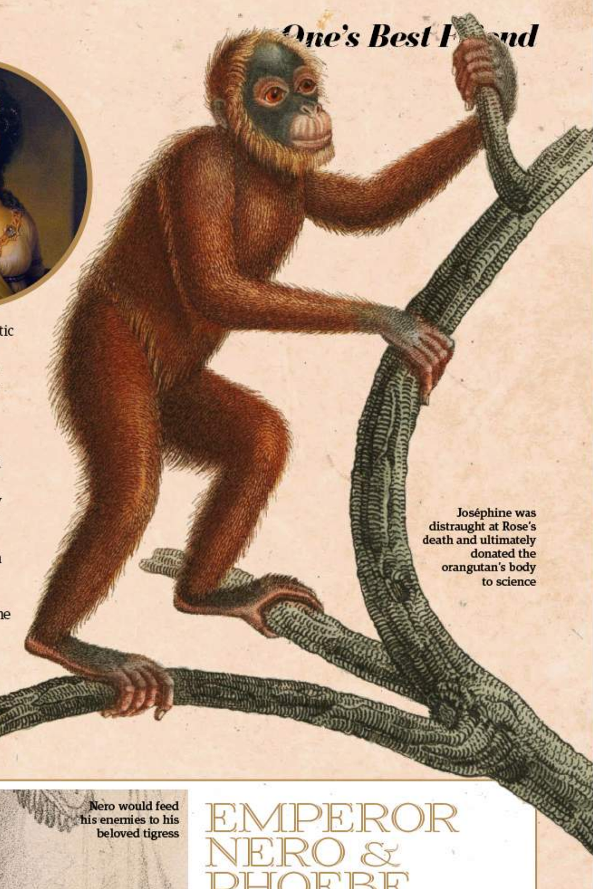
EMPRESS JOSÉPHINE & ROSE

An unlikely companionship in Napoleonic France

Empress Joséphine, the first wife of Napoleon, had a menagerie full of exotic animals that she loved, but none more so than her orangutan, Rose. Most likely named after Joséphine's favourite flower, Rose was presented to the empress by General Charles Decaen, governor of Pondicherry. She was the first of her species to arrive in France and quickly demonstrated what an intelligent creature she was.

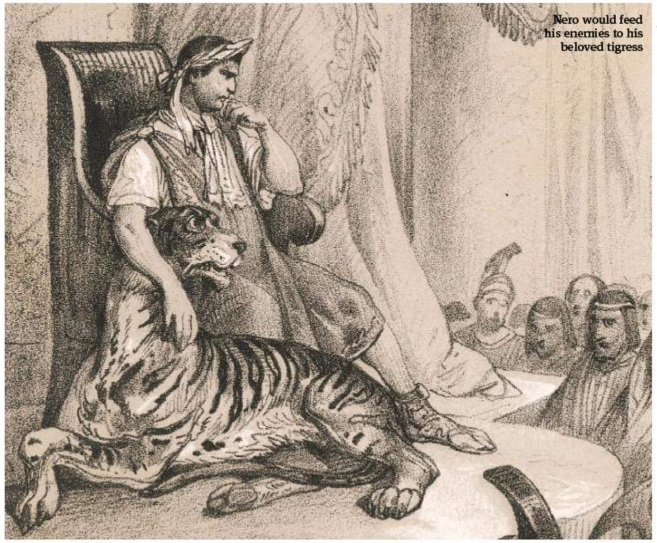
Rose was known to wear white cotton chemises and exhibit good manners, greeting guests of the empress in a dignified manner. She would normally eat turnips, her favourite food, for dinner and would sit "at the table with a knife and fork." To top it off, it was reported that Rose actually slept in the same bed alongside Joséphine and Napoleon, which by itself indicates how important she was to the empress.

Although Joséphine loved her dearly, Rose did not adjust well to a life in captivity. Just five months after her arrival, she passed away, leaving the empress devastated. Having an interest in biology herself, Joséphine sent Rose's body to Georges-Frédéric Cuvier, head keeper of the menagerie at the Natural History Museum in Paris, for him to study.



Joséphine was distraught at Rose's death and ultimately donated the orangutan's body to science

> **"Rose was known to wear white cotton chemises and exhibit good manners"**



Nero would feed his enemies to his beloved tigress

EMPEROR NERO & PHOEBE

Tiger, tiger burning bright

While a tiger might not be the obvious choice for a pet today, for Roman emperor Nero it was an entirely different story. After being impressed by a vicious tigress in a wild beast fight at the Colosseum, the emperor – who is best known for doing nothing while Rome burned – decided to rescue the animal and adopt her. Nero called his new pet Phoebe and she quickly became his favourite companion, keeping her near him at all times. Phoebe was allowed to eat her dinner at the table with the emperor and he had a luxurious gold cage built for her to sleep in at night.

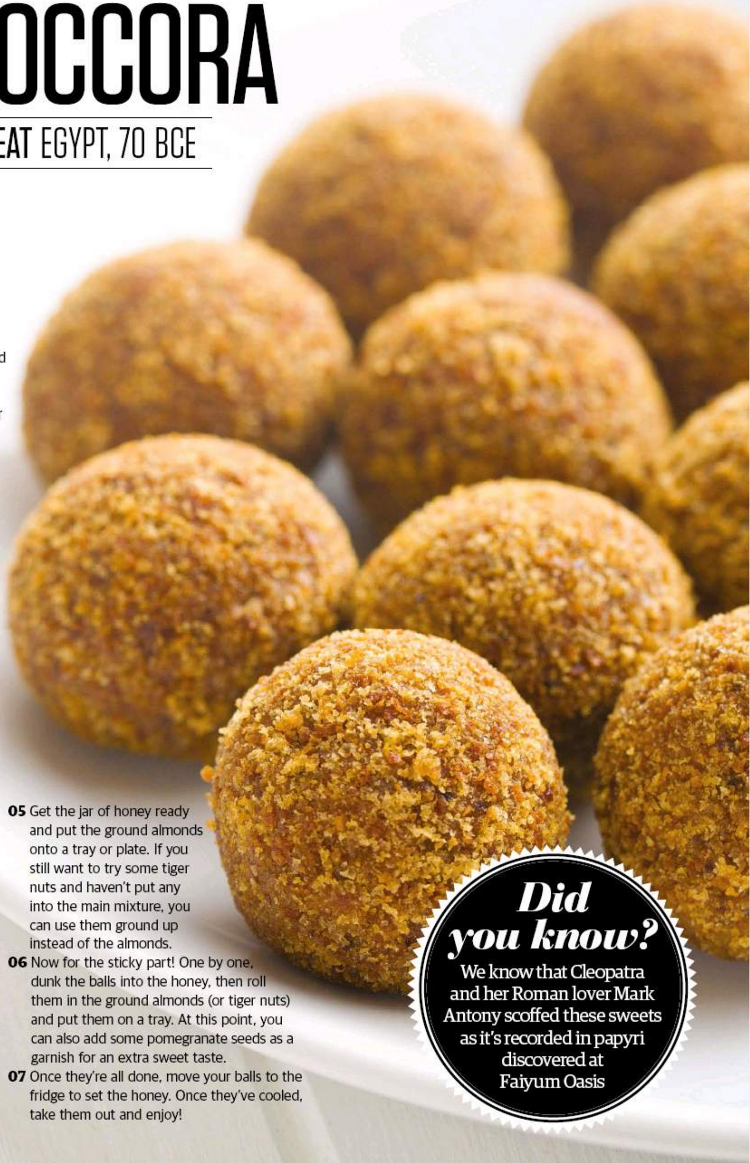
However, Phoebe was not supposed to be just a domesticated pet. Known for his ruthlessness, Nero was happy to give his enemies to Phoebe so that she could indulge in an impromptu snack – anyone who offended, opposed or irritated him was at risk of being eaten alive. Together, Nero and Phoebe were an extremely dangerous pairing!

© Alamy, Getty Images

How to make…

DULCIS COCCORA

CLEOPATRA'S FAVOURITE TREAT EGYPT, 70 BCE



These delicious delicacies filled with honey and nuts were originally known as 'tiger nut sweets' and a recipe for them is reported to have appeared on a broken piece of Egyptian pottery dating from 1600 BCE.

Tiger nuts come from the yellow nutsedge plant. They were so revered in Ancient Egypt that tombs were with filled with the nut as well as decorated with images of them. But they are considered a weed by many farmers today, so don't appear in modern recipes for dulcis coccora. This could be about to change though, as some dieticians have labelled tiger nuts a 'super food' as they are high in fibre.

No dulcis coccora is complete without another Ancient Egyptian delicacy: honey. Beekeepers first appeared in Egyptian hieroglyphs dating from the First Dynasty, around 5,000 years ago. Bees and their products were more than just agricultural — they had great significance in many other things such as Egyptian medicine and religious rituals.

Ingredients

- 450g dates
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground cardamom
- Handful of walnuts
- Jar of runny honey
- Handful of ground almonds
- Water
- Optional extras: tiger nuts, pomegranate seeds

METHOD

01 Begin by finely chopping the dates and walnuts. Dried dates can work very well, too!

02 In a large bowl, add the chopped dates and walnuts and mix them with the spices. If you're keen to try the Ancient Egyptians' staple tiger nut, you can try grinding these and adding them, too. Ground tiger nuts are available from health food shops or, for the utmost in authenticity, you can get the pestle and mortar out!

03 Combine everything until the mixture becomes sticky. Add small amounts of water to get the ideal consistency.

04 Next, take a handful of the mixture and roll them into golf ball-sized spheres until all of the mixture has been used up. Once done, put them to one side.

05 Get the jar of honey ready and put the ground almonds onto a tray or plate. If you still want to try some tiger nuts and haven't put any into the main mixture, you can use them ground up instead of the almonds.

06 Now for the sticky part! One by one, dunk the balls into the honey, then roll them in the ground almonds (or tiger nuts) and put them on a tray. At this point, you can also add some pomegranate seeds as a garnish for an extra sweet taste.

07 Once they're all done, move your balls to the fridge to set the honey. Once they've cooled, take them out and enjoy!

Did you know?

We know that Cleopatra and her Roman lover Mark Antony scoffed these sweets as it's recorded in papyri discovered at Faiyum Oasis

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REVIEWS

The books, TV shows and films causing a stir in the history world this month

ELIZABETH'S RIVAL: THE TUMULTUOUS TALE OF LETTICE KNOLLYS, COUNTESS OF LEICESTER

A much-needed reassessment of this remarkable, marginalised figure

Author Nicola Tallis **Publisher** Michael O'Mara Books **Price** £20 **Released** Out now

A woman who outlived three husbands, six children and seven monarchs, Lettice Knollys was, as author Nicola Tallis puts it, "the last of the great Elizabethan survivors." She has never been the centre of attention but, for the first time, the countess of Leicester gets the full-length biography that she so rightly deserves.

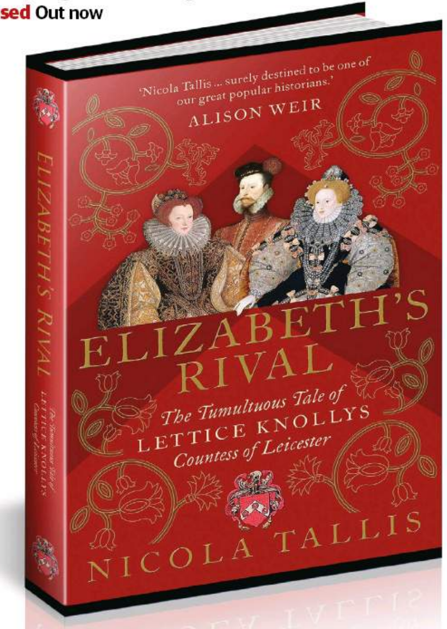
Off the bat, Tallis makes a bold claim that Lettice may have been the illegitimate granddaughter of Henry VIII through her maternal grandmother, Mary Boleyn. Although we will never be certain, Lettice's position as grandniece of Anne Boleyn – and therefore first cousin once removed to Elizabeth I – would have ensured that she was a prominent figure at the royal court.

Tallis covers Lettice's entire life, from her childhood right up to the day she died aged 91, during Charles I's reign. It is interesting to explore her first marriage to Walter Devereux, 1st Earl of Essex, and their separation as he was stationed in Ireland for two years. It was during this time that Lettice developed a relationship with Robert Dudley, the earl of Leicester and Elizabeth's favourite. Lettice's affair with Dudley culminates in their clandestine marriage after Devereux's death. Throughout the entire book, Tallis' thorough research is clear to see and her passion for the subject is evident in the narrative.

It is great to see Lettice finally step out of Dudley and Elizabeth's shadows. For too long she has been demoted to the position of 'the other woman' and a rival for Dudley's affections. As Tallis points out, Lettice has been portrayed in popular culture as "outspoken, haughty, arrogant and unrepentant," as influenced by the bad light cast upon her by historians during and after her lifetime. Here, Lettice's character is reassessed and we finally discover the woman who truly loved Dudley, was devoted to her children and lived through an unspeakable amount of loss, including the executions of her third husband, Sir Christopher Blount, and her first-born son, the earl of Essex.

It strikes a chord that the deterioration of Lettice and Elizabeth's relationship was not just about jealously, pettiness or rivalry – it was about heartbreak. Elizabeth was left devastated by Dudley's marriage to Lettice but a union between him and the Virgin Queen was never in their future. The fracturing of Lettice and Elizabeth's once close relationship is a tale that Tallis tells in a beautiful and thought-provoking way, against the backdrop of political and religious turmoil at the royal court.

Elizabeth's Rival stands as a testament as to why the figures that are cast aside in history should be explored. As the previous author of Lady Jane Grey biography *Crown of Blood*, it is great to see Tallis blazing a trail into the far corners of Tudor history with such aplomb. It is no surprise that Elizabeth I dominates a large part of this period's historical scholarship but for those wanting to discover the other side of the story, this is the perfect book for you.


'Nicola Tallis ... surely destined to be one of our great popular historians.'
ALISON WEIR
ELIZABETH'S RIVAL
The Tumultuous Tale of LETTICE KNOLLYS Countess of Leicester
NICOLA TALLIS

> "Tallis' thorough research is clear to see and her passion for the subject is evident in the narrative"

LADY FANSHAWE'S RECEIPT BOOK: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A CIVIL WAR HEROINE

An ordinary woman in extraordinary time

Author Lucy Moore **Publisher** Atlantic Books **Price** £20 **Released** Out now

"Marriage was a seventeenth century woman's career" writes Lucy Moore, with respectable females anticipating unions with well-connected, prosperous men, lived out in elegant surroundings fit to fulfil their wifely and motherly duties. But in the chasm of the Civil War, England's rocky foundations crumbled and all had to adapt to a world with no clear future in sight.

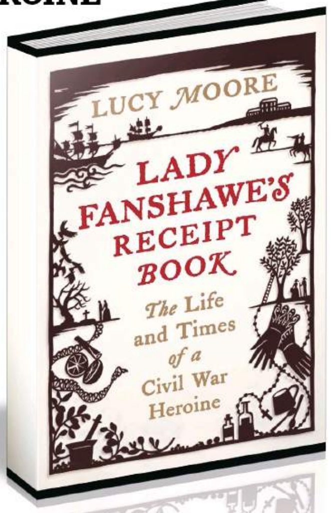
As a daughter and wife to servants of the crown, Ann Fanshawe was a true Royalist and, as one might expect, her family endured years of peril trying to keep their cause's flame alive.

To piece together Ann's dramatic life, author Lucy Moore consults not only her memoirs, but her receipt book – a carefully cultivated collection of medicinal recipes shared by family and friends. It was an essential handbook pointing to the wife's role as head of her household and, beyond that, a benefactor to the community.

The result is a thrilling leap into one of England's most tumultuous eras, which convincingly asserts that the women of the time were not the passive players that we assume, but actually active participants in a feminine sphere that fostered and nurtured relationships between families. This was something that was particularly essential for the Cavaliers, who would face years of hardship before Charles II's supporters finally managed to bring an end to the Commonwealth and allow the king-in-waiting to claim his throne in 1660.

Ann hardly left her beloved diplomat husband Richard's side during the wars and the Protectorate, moving with him from place to place, each slightly worse than the place before it. They embarked on dangerous yet invigorating adventures and left their imprint.

Through this book, we gain valuable insight into the wider Royalist circle with a dizzying array of figures weaved into the narrative, rooted in a depth of research dotted with exciting detail. The result is an original work demonstrating the skills that women of the time possessed and how they utilised them to full effect to preserve their families. What is clear is that wives had more weight than might be believed.


LUCY MOORE
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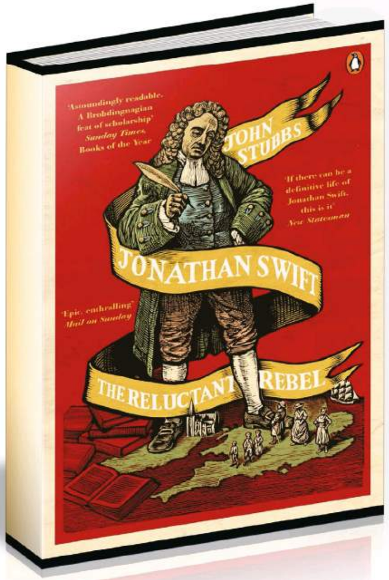
The Life and Times of a Civil War Heroine


'Astoundingly readable. A Brobdingnagian feat of scholarship' Sunday Times, Books of the Year
JOHN STUBBS
'If there can be a definitive life of Jonathan Swift, this is it' New Statesman
JONATHAN SWIFT
'Epic, enthralling' Mail on Sunday
THE RELUCTANT REBEL

JONATHAN SWIFT: THE RELUCTANT REBEL

The man who made Gulliver

Author John Stubbs **Publisher** Viking Books **Price** £11 **Released** Out now

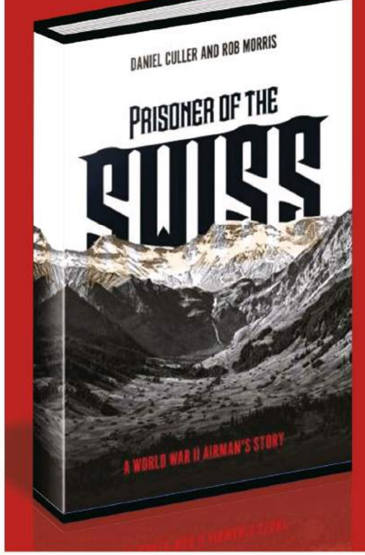
Jonathan Swift was, allegedly, kidnapped by his wet nurse and spirited away from Ireland to England. He was, shockingly, once confronted with a bomb hidden inside a band-box. And he was, famously, the man who made Gulliver.

The life of this Anglo-Irish satirist was as complicated as it was extraordinary, and the period in which he lived was turbulent and fraught with tension. *The Reluctant Rebel* captures this, creating an extensive biography of a remarkable man and a detailed history of the world he inhabited. Swift's life – his family history, childhood, education and career – are all meticulously covered. The tangled relationships he formed with Esther Johnson and Esther Vanhomrigh, whom he styled 'Stella' and 'Vanessa' respectively, particularly stand out. These relationships are woven, or perhaps knotted, through the book and were central to Swift's complex life.

But a further central aspect of Swift's life was, of course, his writing. His pen scorned, rebuked and critiqued. His writings created challenging, disturbing images. In particular, *Gulliver's Travels*, is one distinctly prominent piece of work. But in making Gulliver, Swift not only made a famous literary character – he made his readers look at the world through a different pair of eyes. Swift's work marked him as a rebel, however reluctant he have been to accept the moniker.

In this tome, John Stubbs carefully explores Swift's life, written work, aforementioned rebellion and its corresponding reluctance. Stubbs paints a detailed and intricate portrait with the lightest of brush strokes. The narrative remains clear and engaging and its scope is wide-ranging.

Naturally, this authoritative account is a must-read for those already interested in Swift's life and work. However, Swift emerges from *The Reluctant Rebel* as a man at odds, perhaps at loggerheads, with the world. He is an intriguing figure and it is likely that this biography will have a broad appeal.



PRISONER OF THE SWISS

Switzerland's dark WWII history revealed

Author Daniel Culler and Rob Morris **Publisher** Casemate
Price £20 **Released** Out now

Once a nation of mercenaries, Switzerland cemented its infamous position as a neutral state during the Napoleonic Wars. In fact, such was its desire to remain impartial that it rigidly enforced the 1907 Hague Convention requirement that all foreign troops entering the country would be interned in camps during World War II, resulting in the imprisonment of 1,517 US airmen that sought asylum there during the struggle to liberate Europe. Daniel Culler was one of them.

Feeling honour-bound to sign up in the wake of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Culler became the first flight engineer in a bombing crew that flew 24 successful missions over Germany. But his luck wouldn't last – his plane was shot down during a bombing raid in what would have been his final mission.

Having avoided landing in Germany, the crew aimed for Switzerland, a place that should have offered them refuge. Instead, Culler found himself first interned in an old ski resort before eventually being sent to the dreaded 'Black Hole of Wauwilermoos', a camp run by Andre Beguin, a fervent Nazi.

Abandoned by the US and the Swiss, Culler endured nothing short of hell. Forced to stand for days on end and given barely enough to eat, he contracted tuberculosis. What makes his tale even more horrifying is the fact that upon his eventual escape, he was forced to remain quiet for fear of upsetting American-Swiss relations.

Mocked for decades by his own military, Culler's perseverance led to official apologies from the Swiss and the US. But, far more importantly, he has shone a searing light on Switzerland's treatment of its prisoners during the war, a crime that would otherwise have been covered by the snow of the Alps and the sands of time.

HISTORY of WAR RECOMMENDS...

Churchill: Warrior

Author Brian Lavery **Price** £25
Publisher Casemate

When Winston Churchill was elected prime minister for the first time in 1940, Britain was already at war. He later wrote of the event: "I felt […] that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial". Veteran history writer Brian Lavery's new biography explores that past life in great detail, including Churchill's time as a colonial soldier, a war correspondent covering the Boer War and as a long-serving politician.

The author of the 2010 bestseller *Empire of the Seas* chronicles the British Bulldog's many exploits and insightfully considers how Churchill's military background and experience of command shaped his ability to win World War II.

THE RISE OF ROME: FROM THE IRON AGE TO THE PUNIC WARS

Going back to the beginning

Author Kathryn Lomas **Publisher** Profile Books
Price £25 **Released** Out now

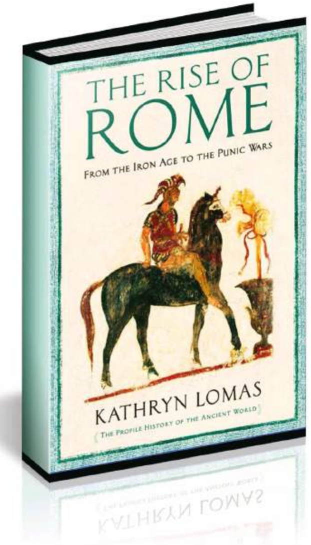
Starting in 1000 BCE and hurtling chronologically to the start of the First Punic War in 264 BCE, Kathryn Lomas takes you on a journey through the early years of one of history's most famous states. Tales of political intrigue and turmoil are interspersed with comments on society and culture along with some of the key players.

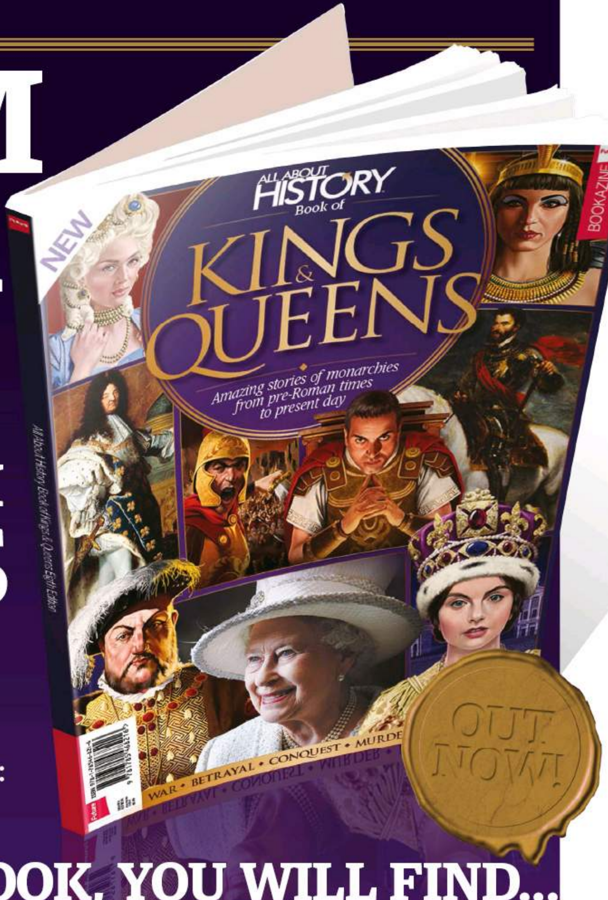
Despite its occasional dryness, one of the best things about this books is that it doesn't require much prior knowledge. Latin terms like 'quaestor' and 'hospes' are all translated and explained, and a list of sources and references means that you can look further into everything in your own time.

If you wish to explore further afield, there's also a handy guide to archaeological sites and museums in Italy concerned with the Etruscans and everything Italian up to the Punic Wars. Lomas doesn't just send you away to find more information, though. At the back is a helpful appendix with a neat timeline spanning the book's date range.

Those worried about reading a wall of text needn't – illustrations, tables and maps provide levity and three sets of plates interject. The colour photographs they display are a welcome addition, helping bring the text to life.

All in all, it's an interesting and informative read for those wishing to know more about Rome's early years. Covering archaeology, the role of women and more, there's something for everyone.





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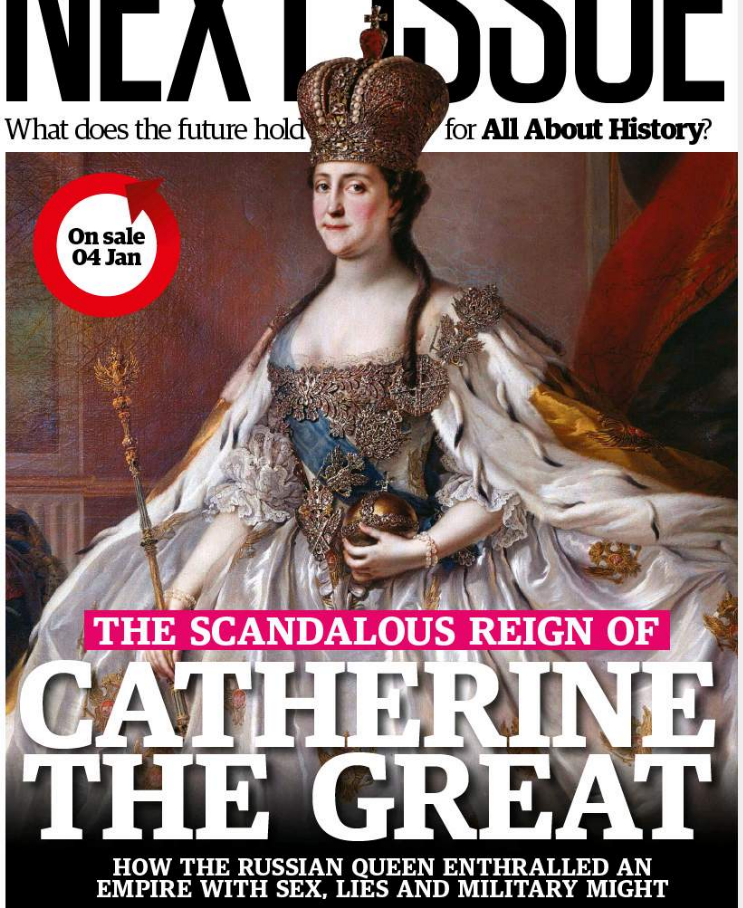

THE SCANDALOUS REIGN OF CATHERINE THE GREAT

HOW THE RUSSIAN QUEEN ENTHRALLED AN EMPIRE WITH SEX, LIES AND MILITARY MIGHT

AUSTRALIA'S PEAKY BLINDERS

The razor gangs' turf war that kept 1920s Sydney on a knife edge

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Did the conqueror's school lessons with Aristotle shape his rule?

HAVE A BLAST IN ATOMIC CITY

Inside the Vegas 'detonation parties' that taught America to love the bomb

PLUS: Santa Anna: Napoleon of the West, The king's pearl: Henry VIII and Mary I, **The golden age of steam trains,** Battle of Cape Ecomnus, **History guide to 2018**

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HISTORY VS HOLLYWOOD

Fact versus fiction on the silver screen

ALONE IN BERLIN

Director: Vincent Perez **Starring:** Emma Thompson, Brendan Gleeson, Daniel Brühl, Mikael Persbrandt, Louis Hofman, Katharina Schüttler **Country:** Germany, France, United Kingdom **Released:** 2016

How much truth remains in this story of a bereaved German couple, Otto and Elsie Hampel, spreading anti-Nazi leaflets in World War II?

C

VERDICT A successful adaptation of the novel – less so of the truth!

01 Based on Hans Fallada's fictionalised account of the real-life rebels, some of the film's inaccuracies can be traced back to Fallada's novel. In reality it was Elise's brother who died, but both the novel and the film have changed this to the couple's son.

02 Otto and Elise had been married for less than five years when war broke out and were in their mid and early 40s respectively when they died in 1943. At 62 and 58 years old, Gleeson and Thompson are almost 20 years older than their real-life counterparts.

03 For a city in the midst of a brutal conflict, Perez's vision of Berlin looks surprisingly picturesque. It's clean and bright, with one or two bucolic scenes that look as though they belong in the glossy pages of a travel brochure rather than a wartime drama!

04 The film and novel both show Otto's execution. The book spares Anna the guillotine by having her die in a bombing raid, while her screen counterpart is last seen on death row, awaiting her fate. In fact, both Otto and Elise were guillotined in April 1943.

05 The novel's Escherich is a Gestapo officer, while the movie shows him as a conflicted but dedicated policeman ashamed of his part in the couple's fate. His final scattering of their postcards and suicide might be dramatically satisfying, but it never happened.

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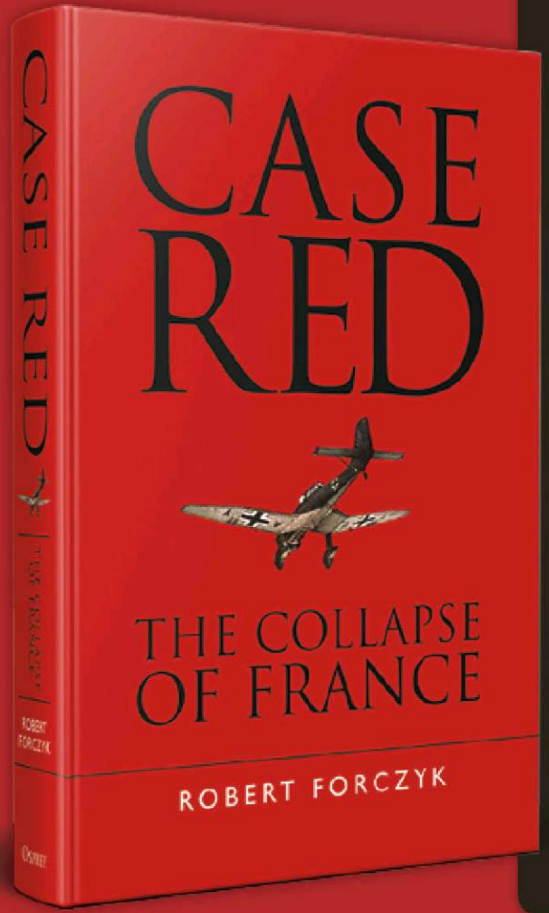

WE MARCH AGAINST ENGLAND
OPERATION SEA LION
1940–41
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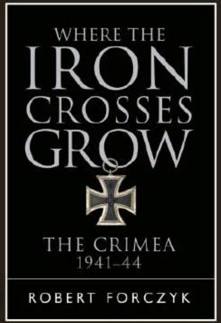

Following the evacuation at Dunkirk, the remaining British forces fought on in the defence of France. In response, Nazi Germany launched Case Red, a final offensive which crushed the remaining Allied armies. Capturing the drama of this catastrophic defeat, Robert Forczyk explains how and why France fell in June 1940.

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